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LENKA'S STORY

A TIME AND A PLACE

by

LENKA ROSE

and

ESTHER RESNIK

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FORWARD

"There but for the grace of God, go I"

Czechoslovakia in the 1930's was a country of contrasts. The supercharged urban atmosphere of change and new ideas was virtually unknown in the bucolic countryside where lives meandered along as they had for centuries. In the agricultural mileu of the Carpatho-Ukraine, skilled Jewish artisans like Zalman Kopolovic, Lenka's father, maintained contact with city life via the radio and the newspapers, and encouraged their children to emulate their own religious life, to work and to study to the best of their abilities. Political undercurrents were never absent, yet daily life required so much physical effort that few people concerned themselves with the big city problems.

The Jews of the mountainous Carpathian region were learned, religiously observant, and greatly influenced by the Hasidic leader, the Baal Shem Tov. When the area known as Ruthenia was ceded from Hungary to Czechoslovakia via the 1920 Treaty of Trianon, its citizens obtained full equality before the law. For the first time, the Jews of the region were granted political and civic rights. As a result, they listened to rumblings of war in the early 1930's with trepidation. Their equality was less than a generation old. As soon as Hitler came into power, the anti-Semitic rhetoric of his propaganda mills inundated central Europe, sending shivering ripples throughout the Jewish world. Czech Jews

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had faith in their government and its president, Tomas Garrigue Masaryk, and only when the Czech army collapsed under Hitler's onslaught did they recognize their danger.

This is the world Lenka Rose has recreated in these pages, and through which she leads us as events tear up her life. She retraces her concentration camp experiences and draws us into a remarkable Swedish rescue epoch. Hers is a courageous story that deserves recording.

When Lenka asked me to be her 'little sister' over twenty years ago, I did not imagine that our friendship would evolve into her autobiography. We met in the ranks of Providence, Rhode Island, Hadassah volunteers over twenty five years ago and our friendship developed along with our mutual respect for each other. In particular, I was drawn to Lenka's tireless efforts on behalf of world Jewry. Despite many physical infirmities, she never failed to accomplish each task she undertook.

Lenka's European background contrasts sharply with my 'American-born' status, yet our shared Jewish point of view brought us together in Hadassah where we served as officers, and consecutive presidents. Her sincere devotion to her people and her ability to involve others expanded the membership ranks dramatically during her presidency from 1974 to 1976. We teamed up frequently during those years, with my American university training complementing her natural organizational abilities and insecurities with her adopted tongue.

There are other, more dramatic contrasts. She stands 4'11" tall, and could be mistaken for my 'little' sister had I had one. And Lenka has overcome major medical assaults, including four hip replacement operations, the first just eight months after the birth of her son, the remaining three within the span of our friendship. It was perhaps as I sat with her after one of her surgeries, that we first spoke of her story and its value as a historical document. But not until September 4, 1984 did she begin to resurrect her lost world with pencil and paper.

The task has had its joyous moments such as Lenka's reminiscences of her mother's kitchen, of racing to the town well with her friends, of the taste of 'American nuts'. But more of it has been a burden because with each step backward in time, Lenka suffered such deep emotional pain that her health has been adversely affected.

My role in this tour de force began as editor, since Lenka requested that I work with her text, revising and editing as necessary in order to produce a grammatically correct, structured book. Without losing her point of view or altering the contents, I have attempted to retain the flavor of her native language through several complete text revisions. Writing, consultation, and revision have taken us three rewarding years.

Esther Resnik

INTRODUCTION

I am a survivor of the Holocaust who should have told my story years ago. But the memories were too fresh, the pain too severe. I had to come to terms with the impact of the events on my life. By the time my feelings settled and the pain lessened, I hesitated because I felt that no language was rich enough to describe it. Then a segment of American society, wanting to rewrite history, started saying that the Holocaust never took place. I realized it was time to record my experiences.

I have always been a people person, receptive to feelings and reactions, and full of love and concern for others. This sensitivity exposes my own vulnerability, especially since I was blessed with a face that instantly reflects my inner emotions. I feel very fortunate that I experienced intense familial love and caring in my early life, the real caring for others that can expose a person to the deepest pain, and can also bring great and lasting joy. I am fortunate in having had the opportunity to express my feelings when speaking of my experiences as a Holocaust survivor.

The language and cultural differences that set newcomers to America apart continue to affect my life. People who have thrown off the yoke of the past do not wish to be reminded of their European heritage, a heritage

that is so important to the foreign-born American. The losses we survivors experienced of our parents and extended families have created within us the continued need for tolerance and understanding and peoplehood. We are an ancient people, rich in our traditions, and for us, there can be no future without the past.

I am going to describe my people, where I came from and who we are so that future generations will understand how the Jewish people lived and died, proclaiming with our last breath, "Am Yisroel Chai." (May the Jewish People Live!)

MY LIFE

I was about two years old. I stood holding onto the railing near the front door of our rented house in Nelipeno, when terrible wailing burst from the house. I looked inside and saw dark-clothed women bent over the crib, swaying and chanting. As they moved back and forth, they passed a tray of nine live coals over my baby brother, repeating and repeating:

„Ales beis und ales shlecht sol fun dier aveck gein." (Everything harmful and everything bad shall leave you.)

Throughout my childhood in rural Czechoslovakia, I saw this ritual repeated whenever anyone took sick. The seriousness of the disease was determined by the length of time it took the flaming coals to die. My people believed in the evil eye ('yeicer harah' in Yiddish).

The infant died. No one remains alive today to tell the name of my beautiful blue eyed baby brother. I was too young to remember and thanks to Hitler's 'final solution', our parents and grandparents did not live long enough to perpetuate his memory. This child is not forgotten. For him, for my parents, and for my sisters, I begin this story. I want my son, Chaim Leib (Harold Lawrence) and his children to know their maternal ancestors.

Grandma Ruchel married a man with the same last name, Leib Duvid Kopolovic. His death during the 'black plague' left her with six children to raise in the three room house she owned in the town of Nelipeno in eastern Czechoslovakia. This area of the Carpatho-Ukraine had belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire prior to World War II when it became Czechoslovakia.

How did this poor woman make a living? She partitioned off and rented one room to a barber who became the family's friend and mentor. His rent varied according to his income. In addition, Babbika (Grandma)Ruchel baked croissants daily and peddled them on the street in the Nelipeno Spa. She carried the fresh warm rolls piled high on a tray that hung from wide shoulder straps, and in her hauntingly beautiful voice, called out, "Rohliky, kupite, rohliky." (Croissants for sale), and sold them all in a few minutes.

Nelipeno's mineral springs were so famous that people came from all over the world for 'cures' for their stomach aches and rheumatism. Fragrant acacia and camellia trees lined the street leading to the Spa, filling the air with sweet aromas. I was very proud of my birthplace with its hills and lush foliage, its cold pure waters and its clear mountain air.

We entered Babbika's house through the side door into the kitchen because her front door, surrounded by flowers, served as the entrance to the barber shop. The long narrow kitchen, as wide as the house, had an honest to goodness 'prepichok', like the one celebrated in Yiddish song:

"Bei dem prepichok brent ein feirel ond dos house is hais." (In the oven burns the flame and the house is hot.)

This oven, stove, bed, hot water tub, counter space, all in one, took up one quarter of the kitchen. On that stove, Babbika whipped up our favorite dish when we came to visit. She cooked the popular Czech mushrooms, onions, and, in season, green peppers, in a cast iron pan and served the delicacy with homemade bread, fresh churned butter, and her famous 'rohliky' (croissants). What a feast!

Babbika drew buckets of fresh water from a nearby outside pump and stored them on a table next to the steel bed in a corner of the kitchen. Under the table, a lined wooden barrel waited on the clay floor for used water. Babbika also served fresh mineral water as an aid to digestion. Mineral water was a common household item in Nelipeno because anyone could carry a jug to the government owned Spa, and take as much as they wished.

Babbika lived in the kitchen and the simply furnished clay floored family room. Two high beds with high board polsters were practically hidden beneath burlap covered mattresses that she covered with a tucked in sheet, goose down bedding, down pillows and as many perenyes (today we call

them puffs) as the family needed. Hand embroidered bedspreads topped them off. Believe me, they reached high on the beds. A table and chairs, a divan, a credenza and a small table completed her furnishings. The door, to the right of one bed, led to the barber shop. I can still see her sheer white curtains ruffling in the gentle breezes from the two front windows, brightening the room. And I can smell the burning wood chips, the waste product from a local parquet flooring factory that she bought to fuel her wood burning stove.

The people who lived in back of Babbika's house, her next door neighbors, and the people who lived on both sides of them all used her driveway. When it rained, horses struggled for a footing, their wagon wheels sank deep in the muck, and so did we. In the midst of this seasonal sea of mud, Babbika's house stayed clean and neat.

The yard behind her stucco house held the chicken coop, an outhouse and a wonderful pear tree that bore so much fruit each fall that its branches bent down and touched the ground. Our weekly visits always ended with those delicious pears to carry home to Svaljava, a walk of nearly three kilometers.

All but one of Babbika's children evidenced artistic abilities. That son, Avrum, the black sheep of the family, troubled his mother from the time he killed a chicken, planted it in the ground, and waited to see if

a tree would grow out of it. Avrum may still be alive. My late Uncle Shloime heard from him from somewhere in Russia, and once told me that Avrum married a Russian woman.

Babbika's greatest disappointment resulted from my father's decision to marry at the age of nineteen. She had hoped that her eldest son, (my father) Zalman, would help her support the family. Instead, he left her stranded with five children to raise alone. According to him, he learned early on that life was not easy and that he had to help his mother. He did it by smuggling cigarettes between Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary. He loved to describe those days to us children, always reminding us that to be caught meant certain death. He explained that when it came to survival, you had to take a chance. I always felt the estrangement between them and wished that they had a better relationship. He did try to help her financially, but as his own family grew, he could barely take care of us. Those were the Depression years in America and the whole world was caught up in it.

Babbika's second child, Blima, ~~or~~ (Blanka,) sat for hours patiently doing her needlepoint. I loved her dearly and remember watching her as she carefully created wonderful tapestries. When I came to America and visited my New York cousins, Joe and Sarah Hoffman, I asked if the picture hanging in their home was made by Aunt Blima. Their "Yes" was no surprise. Her intricate work was unmistakable.

As the story goes, Neini (Aunt) Blima met and fell in love with a Hungarian JCW who promised marriage. She bore a child, and the father came to see his newborn son. The couple agreed that he would return shortly and they would marry. The date was set. The 'chupa', the wedding canopy, was prepared at our house. I remember the day as if it were today. Everybody was so happy. Our house was spotless. We spent days preparing the food. Everything was set to go, but the groom never appeared. My poor unlucky Neini Blima never recovered from the humiliation of her ordeal.

Years later, she developed gallbladder trouble. Before she underwent surgery, her skin turned yellow and she suffered excruciating pain. My Neini Ida, who lived in Mukachevo, and I visited Neini Blima after her operation in the Mukachevo Hospital. Blima survived the surgery but died three days later. Blima's son, David, and I went by train to Mukachevo for the funeral that was arranged according to our tradition by the Jewish burial society. Poor David! He and his mother had been very close. I felt sorry for him, for myself, and for Babbika on whom he would depend from then on. Our Babbika Ruchel had a soft spot for him right along. After all, he had grown up in her house.

She was perpetual motion, my little bent-over Babbika. She wore a babushka on her head, a full gathered skirt and a long sleeved blouse which closed at the back and topped it all off with a shawl. I don't

remember ever seeing her dressed differently.

After Babbika developed diabetes, she ate only black bread, the standard diabetic diet in those days. Until then, my younger brother, Benci, and I brought Mamika's pastries to Babbika every Saturday morning. We carried a basket filled with delicious raised dough deltelech, kipelech or mun kuchen. Deltelech were squares of dough filled with cheese, sugar, eggs, and cinnamon, with the four corners folded up to meet in the middle. Kipelech or croissants were filled with butter or margarine, sugar, cinnamon and raisins. The mun kuchen needed the most elaborate preparations. Mamika crushed poppy seeds in a special mill, boiled them with sugar and milk until they reached the right consistency, then spread them over a large circle of dough, topped it with raisins and rolled it into a jelly roll.

The six of us had our fill Saturday mornings. We picked out the raisins from the mun kuchen and made a deal with our older brother, Dudie. He paid us one heller (a penny) for them on Saturday night. (We could not handle any money on the Sabbath.) On Sunday, I ran to our neighbor's store to buy American nuts (peanuts) with my money.

Babbika's fourth child, Ida, apprenticed to learn to make hand embroidered lingerie. Her work was so beautiful that she was hired by many families to make trousseaus for their brides-to-be. Ida also married young, to a tailor names Heisler, a top-notch social reformer whose leftist

political affiliation caused my aunt a lot of anguish. Ida and Heisler lived in Mukachevo where they soon had a son and daughter.

In Naini Ida's house, food purchasing waited until she completed a suit or other assignment and their customers were one hundred percent satisfied. Only then would they be paid and have money for food. There were times when they had no work at all. This infuriated my uncle and convinced him that communism would be the answer for the working man.

In 1938, Germany occupied the Sudetan, the German speaking part of Czechoslovakia. In 1939, German troops occupied the rest of my country and Hitler gave the Carpatho-Ukraine to Hungary. At that time, Naini Ida and her family moved from Mukachevo to Svaljava where we lived. It seemed safer for them in our town but their economic struggle worsened. Between them, they employed four people who depended on them for work to meet their daily needs. I remember how often they all went hungry. Just the same, the four were devoted to their employers and worked late hours to complete their assignments. In his own way, my uncle fought for the betterment of mankind. He saw injustices and he tried to correct them.

My Babbika's fifth child, Shloime, loved the most by his nieces and nephews, worked in one of the communist-sponsored stores. After work, he often stopped by our house to bring us goodies like bananas and oranges, unusual foods in our part of the world. We stuck to him like glue. The only way he could get away from us was by sending us outside, telling us to

go and see if he was coming. We little dummies believed him and went out. Then he jumped out the window and disappeared.

Of her six children, only Shloime could help his mother in her old age, and she was grateful for it. But, in 1939, when Hungary drafted young Jewish men for slave labor, Uncle Shloime and his best friend, Moishe, deserted to Russia to fight against the Germans. But Stalin imprisoned them in Siberia, where they remained until Kruschev came to power and liberated them. After the war, Shloime returned to Nelipeno and found his mother's house occupied by complete strangers. No family remained to greet him. For the first time, Shloime heard the horror stories about what had happened to the Jewish people.

Civia, Babbika's youngest daghter, was closest to my age. We were fond of each other and were often told that we looked like sisters. As I write about her, I remember how pretty she was and how many happy times we spent together. There was no future for her in Nelipeno, so, against her mother's wishes, she was sent away to Prag, the capital of Czechoslovakia. There, the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee would give this fatherless young woman a chance in life. Instead, she soon came home with a beautiful blue eyed blond baby boy. She wore a ring on her finger and said she had married a non-Jewish professor at Prag University. Intermarriages were unacceptable in those days to either Christian or Jewish families. I remember how torn my Babbika was, wanting to be closer to her daughter, but

fearing that her neighbors would think she condoned the marriage.

Babbika did her grocery shopping at Baila's store, just up the hill from her house. I did Babbika's errands when we came to visit. She always needed extra things then because there was no telephone in her area so our visits were always unexpected. Babbika wrote down what she needed in her small charge book. The storekeepers, either Baila or another family member, measured out every item from its sack into paper bags. Since they were sort of related, and Aunt Baila's son, Moishe, was my Uncle Shloime's best friend, Baila would give us a gram or so for extra measure. Then she wrote the charge in the little notebook. Business in that store was done on trust. We paid as soon as we had money.

Baila's was the cleanest store I was ever in. Aunt Baila carried all kinds of things and knew where every minute item was. She was about Babbika's age, dressed like her, and lived behind the curtains in the back of the store. She greeted everyone who entered her store with warmth and kindness. I looked forward to going there because she knew how much I liked American nuts (peanuts) and she always handed me some. The taste of them was so delicious that I hated to swallow them.

Babbika lived only for her family and her life was hard. My last memory of her was in Mukachevo where the SS herded all the Jewish people of our area into the small huts where bricks were made, the brick factory. I can still see her in that ghetto, stooped over under the burden of her

eirdown bedding, on her way to Auschwitz, never to be seen again.

My mother, Hencha, a small, beautiful woman, was one of four children, the second of three daughters. Her mother, also named Ruchel, spent her days in bed being cared for by her family. She was an invalid until her death.

Grandfather Chaim, a short man who wore a long beard, owned a lot of land and a liquor store in Holubina, a town about six kilometers from Nelipeno. When my father started courting my mother, her family disapproved because he came from a very poor family. Mamika was seventeen, a tiny, dark eyed blonde, with high cheekbones and a lively way about her, when she met her Zalman. My handsome father with his twinkling greenish brown eyed and trim moustache, stood taller than the average man of his day. For him and my Mamika, it was love at first sight. They met, fell in love and decided to marry.

Mother's older sister, Toba, had already set her wedding date so my parents decided to marry under the same 'chupa' (wedding canopy). Since there was no dowry or any financial help promised to them, my father had to buy his bride the bridal dress and shoes. Toba received 20,000 cronen as her dowry from her father and my mother received nothing.

My father took his bride home to Nelipeno where he was born and where his family lived. The newleyweds moved into a two room house below street level. From the street above, only the roof was visible. But across the

street and up the hill was the famous Nelipeno Spa. Every spring, summer and fall, people came there from all over the world.

Mamika gave birth to four children in that house. The eldest, a son, Leib-Duvid, was named after his paternal grandfather and called Dudie for short. My name is Leah, my nickname -- Lajcsu. Bencien was next, and Rivka, the youngest. Bencie was named for his paternal great-grandfather, a statesman, and the town's most influential person. A natural leader who advice was sought and heeded, he led a long and productive life.

Tatika (father) made a living as an orthopedic shoe manufacturer. He learned how to measure feet, prepare lasts identical to the feet and turn out shoes or boots exactly to the customer's order. People could choose leather colors and type of stitching but only women could order different heel heights. Men's heels never varied in height.

For high boots for men or women, Tatika measured the customer's calf and length of leg between the ankle and the lower part of the knee. A specially-trained helper made the outer parts of the shoes or boots according to those measurements. Father used a special glue to firm up the leather. Then he pulled this boot top over a form, making sure that the glue was evenly distributed between the outer shell and inner lining. After making final adjustments, matching the leather carefully to the customer's measurement, he molded them together. Once the upper part dried, the form was removed. For the lower part of the boot, he took the

last, an exact replica of the customer's foot, and fashioned leather onto it into a shoe. Then he sewed the upper to the inner lining, and attached the shoe. The final step was the addition of the sole and heel.

Tatika loved his work and took pleasure in what he considered a work of art. Eventually, he trained men to work for him, but even the most experienced could not do certain aspects of the work. Tatika prepared the work for the men and they knew when he would take over to complete the job. He alone began and finished each job.

He always had one or two young apprentices to learn the trade. In exchange for room and board, they helped around the house. They lugged water, cut wood, and helped with spring cleaning. Whenever heavy sacks of food, potatoes, flour, or sugar were purchased and needed to be brought into the house, they were asked to help. All of this was agreed on beforehand so that there were no misunderstandings.

This first stage of apprenticeship lasted about two years. By then, an apprentice would receive a salary. As he learned the trade, the young man would become more valuable, too valuable to spend his time doing household chores. Tatika gave each apprentice more responsibility according to his increased level of skill. Tatika taught so well that his apprentices always learned well and could demand higher wages. They stayed on an average of five years before they left for employment in the big cities, and eventually opened their own shops. Tatika never worried about

competition. He said that if you would do right by a customer, he would always come back to you.

As time went on, he became famous for his work. People came from great distances to have his shoes because they were sure that they would get just what they had ordered and that the shoes or boots would fit like a glove. The shoes were made so strong that a person could wear them all year long before needing another pair. In those days, with no cars, we walked everywhere and good shoes were very important.

My Father was especially helpful to people who suffered with club feet or other foot disfigurements. Sometimes he was so busy that customers had to wait a month before he could fill the orders. Many times, people became angry when he could not keep his promised delivery date. Once a big, tall man came to our house, very upset because my father had disappointed him. His boots were not ready on time. He was a forester and had a gun on him. My father saw him coming and told my mother to tell the man that he was not at home. We had a corner behind the high tile space heater where Tatika would hide from his angry customers. When this man stalked in with his gun, he scared me so that when mother said that father was not at home, I piped up with, "Oh, no. He is at home. He is right there." The man went after him and said, "If you did not have such nice children I would shoot you right here and now." When the man left, I was spanked, but I said, "Father, I saved your life."

Tatika was a devoted husband and father. We feared him because when the worries of day to day living were heavy, his temper ran short. And we respected him because he tried so hard to prove to himself that despite humble beginnings he could make life better for his wife and children. At the same time, he also knew that his eldest son, Dudi, would not follow in his footsteps. Tatika was nobody's fool. He knew that there were more prestigious professions. But things like that didn't matter to him. What mattered was to work as hard as he could, and to be a 'mensch' (a genuine man) in the eyes of G-d and man. For someone like my Tatika, who became fatherless at a very young age, who saw his mother's cruel struggle to raise her children singlehandedly, his own success was a great source of pride and satisfaction. He faced his problems squarely and he succeeded.

Tatika's beautiful handwriting marked him as an educated man. When we studied European history, we discovered how well-informed he was on many subjects. Either he had lived through what we were learning or else he had his own report cards full of A's ready to show us. We children studied hard to compete with him. I remember the intense political discussions he had with Dudi, analyzing the political conditions affecting the Jewish people.

He gave tzedekah (charity) proudly. A religious man, he 'laid tfilim' daily. (the fulfilment of the Biblical command to "wear them as a frontlet before thine eyes"). Our family seats were in the orthodox shul

(synagogue), facing the Western Wall. Tatika sat downstairs. Mamika sat in the women's section, in the balcony, separated from the men. She wore a beret that covered her entire head. Only a few wisps of light blonde hair showed around her face, all that remained since she had her hair shaved off when she married, a custom still observed by orthodox Jews. I was proud to be Zalman Kopolovic's daughter. In our close community where everybody knew everybody else, a person's name meant a lot. My Tatika was highly respected for his professional and political abilities, respect that was shared by his family.

Zeide (Grandpa) Chaim and his son, Aren Beir, both talented fiddlers, often entertained at weddings. I never failed to tell people that Zeide Chaim was MY Zeide. In addition to being a wonderful musician, Zeide cultivated huge farmlands with corn, wheat, potatoes and hay to feed his cows and goats, chickens and geese. When things went badly for us, we went to his farm on Sundays to bring back eggs and milk for ourselves, and corn for our chickens and geese.

Tatika resented our trips to Zeide Chaim for help because bad feelings existed between them from the beginning. Zeide had told him that he would not amount to anything because Tatika came from humble means. My father did not want Zeide to have any reason to be right. He wanted to prove that he could stand on his own two feet without any help.

LIFE IN SVALJAVA

Slowly father's business improved. In the early 1930's, we moved to the city of Svaljava, about three kilometers from Nelipeno. As much as my parents loved beautiful Nelipeno, they wanted the better educational opportunities the city offered our growing family.

The depression took its toll on all the people in our area. Frequently we went to school with nothing in our stomachs. On those days, Mamika rushed to school, her cheeks flushed from the exertion, to bring hamburger meat or bread with jam or peanut butter for our lunch.

We rented a two-room house at an intersection, practically on a ledge above the Svaljava River. We had some land on either side of the house, but there was no back yard, only the steep embankment down to the rushing waters.

Life at the intersection was full of problems. Horse-drawn wagons, carriages, trucks, cars --mostly taxis, passed by. One day, to our horror,a truck came roaring into our house bringing down the front wall and my father's workshop. My younger brother, Bencie, was sitting on one of the low chairs at the bench. It was about noon-time, when the worker was at lunch, a time when Tatika allowed us to sit around the place and play. The truck hit the wall. The wall fell, hitting the chair which, in turn, threw little Bencie to the other side of the room. Bencie was in shock. Except

for the fear, no one got hurt. It took weeks for the wall to be rebuilt. In the meantime we lived in one room, which had a cement floor, a wood burning space heater which formerly served both rooms, and no running water. One winter morning, I insisted on going to school because usually school was warmer than our house. The school was closed so I came home. By the time I reached my house, my nose had frozen. The sight of me frightened Mamika and she would not let me come inside. She had me stay in a cold outer room until my white nose became pink again. She told me that if I had come into the warm room, my nose would have simply fallen off.

Mischievous Bencie played with our Singer sewing machine and dropped the upper part of the machine on his finger. Blood gushed out. Instead of going to our parents for help, he ran through the rooms away from them, the blood spurting out of his injured finger because he feared punishment. Today he has half a nail on that finger.

What I remember mostly about that house was that everybody had something going for him. My parents had hope. My older brother, Dudi was the brain. Big things were expected of him. Bencie was busy getting into trouble. Another new baby arrived and, somewhere in the middle of it all, I was growing up.

As the eldest daughter, I always helped Mamika. And, not always liking the increased responsibilities, I found a way to get attention. I remember

being put in charge of my little sister, Rifka, and wanting to get her out of my way, I set her on fire. I will never forget the punishment I received for it. Years later, when Rifka and I were in Auschwitz, our hair was shaved off. There, on her scalp, was the barren scar of that burn. I knew how she got it but did not tell her. I promised myself that I would protect her with all my might.

Business improved and we were going to have a new house. Tatika purchased land on a side street along the river, about two minutes walk from the house we were renting. The new lot faced empty land across the river. To the left was a bridge built by Oscar the architect. Beyond the bridge stood the Greek Orthodox Church. Our house would face the river and the lovely view. Tatika hired a contractor, a friendly man of German descent, the same Oscar who had built the bridge. He spent so much time with my family that he became good friends with my parents. His wife was not so receptive to us, but, at apple-picking time, she asked us to come over. We children would pick apples any time. Besides, Mamika made apple strudel which Oscar's wife liked.

Our new house would be built of clay bricks. In our region, the Gypsies shaped clay into bricks, put them in forms to dry and stacked them, ready for use. One night, in the midst of a thundering rain storm, a passerby came to tell us that our brick rows had collapsed and were being ruined by the heavy rains. Our parents woke us and we all ran out into the

storm to save our bricks. Tatika picked them up one by one and handed them to me or my brothers. We handed them to Mamika who placed them in the shed for shelter. We worked feverishly all night to save our house. I will never forget that night or the kind man who alerted us. We had come close to losing it all.

Eventually a cellar, three rooms, a veranda and an attic were built and the house was wired for electricity. In Svaljava, electricity was available to anyone who could afford it. Electrical street lamps cast their glow over cobblestone streets throughout the town. At the intersection of Main Street and our street stood an immense square cement building, the electrical transformer for the city's power. When the heavens were angry, and a storm struck our area, lightening played havoc with that tall grey monster. While thunder rocked the mountains, fireworks sparked on our corner. We kids hid our heads between the layers of down bedding, figuring that as long as our heads were safe, we didn't need to consider the rest of our bodies.

After the house was completed,a second building was constructed. It had a chicken coop, a loft for egg laying, room for the geese, a cordoned off area for the forced fat geese, a large space for firewood, and an outhouse, all under one roof.

Workmen built a gigantic tiled space heater in our new front room, and a tiled stove with an oven and a hot water tub built into it, in the

kitchen. End pieces of parquet fueled the stove. Instead of cement floors, we had real wooden flooring made of parquet because Svaljava was the center of parquet manufacturing. Whenever we needed firewood, Tatika went to the parquet factory where he ordered a wagon load of odds and ends to be delivered to our back yard. We children stacked the wood in the storage area with the help of our friends, so we had fun at the same time. We always slept well after a hard day's work.

Other times, whole tree trunks were brought to our yard. Hardy peasants, hired by the day, brought their own cutting equipment and worked outside in the bitter winter weather. First they severed the large tree trunks. Then they cut them into smaller pieces to fit the stove or space heater. Finally, they stacked them in the shed. On my way to the outhouse, I always saw the woodcutters eating the same food, black bread and lard. It must have been nourishing for they were vigorous men.

Mamika's monthly trip to the bank in Mucachevo to pay bills was usually uneventful. But one month she lost her money on the way there. What a terrible time we had! Mamika cried. Tatika didn't know what to do. We felt badly for her, but, at the same time, we asked how she could have been so careless. They finally borrowed money from friends and family members and life returned to normal. During the Depression, conditions in Europa were probably worse than in America. At one point, we took turns going to school because we, the shoemaker's children, didn't have shoes to

wear. Once we left that horrible rented house and moved into our brand new home, life seemed to improve for us. Tatika accepted a proposition from a furniture manufacturer to build a factory on our property. Vaclav the Czech made a deal with my father. Vaclav would build the factory on our land, pay rent on it, and after twenty years, the factory building would be ours. Since my father needed money, he also rented one room of our house to Vaclav and his wife. So there we were in our new house, eight people living in two rooms. I would call this close quarters! Later on, Tatika built an addition to the back room for Vaclav and his wife so that they had a bedroom and their own kitchen.

How did our parents manage in that two-room house? Very well, I would say. The large front room was furnished with two big beds, night tables on either side of each bed, a huge built-in space heater and a divan at the foot of the beds. Six chairs faced the dining table next to the divan, and more chairs stood against the wall next to the shifrobes. The front wall of the house was dominated by the picture window. Next to it stood the family treasure, the Singer sewing machine, Mamika's flowering oleander tree, and the tall blue porcelain lined covered receptacle for the fat rendered from our geese. Colorful hand-hooked rugs, made from our worn out clothes, brightened the parquet floor. Subdued little flowers rolled on a white background decorated the walls. We even had a chandelier hanging in the center of the room.

When money came in, Mamika proudly purchased a Persian valence to hang over the picture window. But she worried about the family that had to sell it for their sustenance. She said, "Dis gelt is calehdic. Haint is this bei mier and morgen bei dier." (Money is round. Today it is with me, tomorrow with you.)

From that picture window we could see the river and beyond it, the broad green field encircled by shrubs. the bridge and the Greek Church were to the left. We could see some houses in the distance, behind the fields, and behind them, the majestic mountains, all in all, a breathtaking panorama.

Inside the house, Oscar's handsome space heater was the center attraction. In our region, snow fell in November and stayed all winter. How I loved to come in out of the icy cold to stand with my back to the heater, warming myself.

Everything happened in our kitchen. Tatika's workshop took up one corner. One set of shelves held our dairy dishes. A second set contained the meat dishes. Our table seemed to me to be magical. All day, it was an ordinary table. At night, one side of the long wooden cube dropped down to serve as a bed. Whenever any of us had been exposed to a communicable disease, Mamika would put us all together into that bed. Why delay the inevitable, was her belief. That table/bed saw us through the measles, chicken pox, sore throats, mumps and german measles. We had such good

times there while we were sick. We could be standing on the mattress and still watch Mamika, flour on her hands, rolling dough and making her wonderful pastries.

Buckets of fresh water lined a long bench while next to it, on the floor, sat the big aluminum bucket for used water. Every day I carried this heavy bucket out of the house, through the front yard and across the street to pour it down the embankment to the river. We used river water for laundry but never for cooking. We knew that others ahead of us did as we did and discarded waste water into the river. It was not unusual to see small animals floating by, thrown there as a way to curb the cat and dog population.

Once the snow fell, getting down to the river for water was difficult. The narrow slate steps got very icy. One slip could cost you your life. We were so young and so agile that we thought we were indestructible. Thinking back, I wonder what our parents thought about sending us out in the cold to fetch the water. I wonder if they were aware of the dangers we faced.

We carried drinking water from a well about four houses away. This well served the thirty families on our street, so naturally, all the neighborhood children met there. When we met on the street with our buckets in hand, we started racing. The first to lower his bucket into the water won the race. I can still hear Mamika's voice calling me because she

needed the water 'at once'.

A dead cat, found in the well, was believed to have caused a flu epidemic. The cat-contaminated water had to be purified in order to quell the rumors. A man lowered into the well, scrubbed its' sides thoroughly, then removed and discarded as much water as possible. Only then would anyone use water from that well.

I think of Mamika when I remember our kitchen. She seemed capable of everything. She baked the most exquisite pastries from scratch. The yeasty smell of her fresh 'cholies' (braided bread) made my mouth water. She cooked, kept us clean and neat, patched our clothes and seemed to have a knack for doing everything right. I never remember her ever spoiling anything. She taught us that the dress could be patched, but it must be clean. That went for shoes and everything else.

She kept a strictly kosher home as did our neighbors, and lived according to 'Halacha' (Jewish law), never questioning her religion. Mamika instilled both the rituals and the beliefs of Judaism in us children to the extent that, for us also, there were no doubts. We were raised feeling good about our Jewishness and this holds true for me to this day.

Mamika had a direct line to G-d. She poured her heart out as she read from the Yiddish sheets written especially for women, the "Tze'enah u-Re'enah"(Come Forth and Behold)* . These pages of prayers seemed to speak to all women's needs, expressing their pain and tribulations, fears,

and there were many, and hopes. As the eldest daughter, I had the privilege of staying nearby to listen as she read. I was young and impressionable and totally agreed with every word she uttered. I didn't realize that, at the time, nearly all the Jewish women in our area were finding consolation in the same lines. (Authored by Jacob Janow of Cracow or Lublin, around 1600, this was an ethical and midrashic commentary on the Five Books of Moses.)

While Tatika worked on boots, Mamika, who loved to read, sat in the kitchen reading to him from books written in Hungarian. She made sure that we children were exposed to secular books and to people of other faiths in our early years so that we would have an understanding of other people in this world. We were never taught that Judaism was the only true religion. My parents hoped that other religious people would do the same thing in reference to us because they knew that ignorance brought untold pain upon people, inflicted by people acting out of ignorance and fear of anyone whose faith differed from their own. We learned early to seek out information for ourselves because second hand information could easily be misinterpreted. Many times, we had seen how truth was distorted and made to suit someone's misguided purpose.

Our parents were devoted to each other. We grew up, knowing that they loved each other and that they struggled together for their children. Life was not easy for them. We went hungry many times during the

Depression years, but deep down, we all felt that better times were coming. My proud father always tried to make things better, no matter how difficult a task he faced. With this kind of attitude, my parents perservered. It often saddened me to think of how hard they had worked and just when they began to see some improvement in their lives, the world around them went utterly crazy. They happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Many extremely observant, ultra-orthodox Jews, people who devoted their lives to the study of 'Torah' (the Bible), lived in Svaljava. We, too, were orthodox and observed the religious laws to the letter, but at the same time, we were in business. Sharing one's blessings with those who devoted themselves to Torah study was an accepted part of our daily life. The widow, the sick, and the homeless were not to be forsaken. Poor beggars always found us, coming from everywhere any time. In mid-morning these 'schnorrers' (beggars) would get a piece of bread and a few pennies. If they came at noon, they were given lunch; if late afternoon, supper and a place to sleep. Mamika feared them because most were infected with lice, yet a place would be made for them to sleep even if it was on the floor. For many, this was the only way they could get some food and money together to take home to their families at the end of the week. Jewish folklore has it: 'Die yidl mit zein pakle' (The Jew with his bundle). If you set down your pakle among others, in the end you will pick up your own because you know what is in it while you never know what 'tsores (trouble) you might

find in another.

When Leah the midwife came to our house, the news travelled fast through our neighborhood. A birth was imminent. Leah assisted at all Mamika's deliveries, usually arriving before the birth and waiting with the family until her services were needed. She slept with the children and was dearly loved by all of us.

Dudie, Bencie, Rifka and I were home the day our sister, Sarah was born. When Mamika's pains began coming frequently, Leah told us to hold hands and go for a walk. We went outside, across the bridge, past the Greek Orthodox Church, to the field that was visible from our front window. We held on to each other for dear life, frightened by our mother's agony. We knew that we could not stay in the house because something extraordinary was taking place. After a long while, Tatika waved us back home to meet our new baby sister. For eight days after Saralle was born, Mamika stayed in the house according to the custom of my people. Sarah was named in the Temple (synagogue). If she had been a boy, there would have been a 'Brit Milah' (circumcision). A new mother did not participate in or be present in the same room when her son was circumcised. It was strictly the father's responsibility.

In a small town like ours, people were very close and totally involved in each other's lives. Happiness, like Sarah's birth, was shared and so were sad times. Out of respect to a deceased person, businesses would let

down their roll-up shutters in front of their stores while a coffin was carried by. Everyone used the same coffin. But, if a person had committed suicide, they were not buried inside the cemetery gates. A 'cohen' (member of the priestly family) was not allowed to go to the cemetery.

When a neighbor, the lovely young mother of two small children, died following a miscarriage, the whole town turned out to pay their respects. Everyone gathered in the family's backyard, weeping for the dead woman and her two motherless children. In time, people said, the man would find another woman. But the children needed a mother right away. So the woman's single sister who lived far away was summoned to come and care for the children. Before long, a romance developed and the community was overjoyed. At last the children would have a mother. Everyone agreed that G-d worked in miraculous ways.

We shopped at the grocery store of our next-door neighbors. They were rich in our eyes because they lived in a five room house that was to be inherited by the oldest daughter, Cillie, on the condition that her sister, Szury, be allowed to live there as long as she wanted. The white bearded grandfather, Moishe, whom we called Moishe Bachi (Hungarian for uncle), lived in one room. He was a butcher but I was sure Moses looked like him. His household numbered seven, including a live-in maid. Old white-haired Moishe continued to work so that his daughter, Cillie, her husband, Jeno Hochman, their two children, Cillie's unmarried sister, Szury, would have

good meat to eat. At the same time, he felt productive.

Early Thursday mornings, kosher meat was delivered to Moishe Bachi's Main Street shop. (Kosher meat was killed according to Jewish law or Halacha.) In his one room store next to his daughter's grocery store, Moishe Bachi prepared all the meat on a huge butcher block bench that stood in the middle of the cement floored room. He had no storage area and no refrigeration so all the meat had to be prepared and gone from the store on the same day.

Whole sides of beef covered with burlap and laying on straw arrived by horse-drawn cart. Moishe Bachi carried the meat inside and began the tedious process of preparation according to the strict regulations of Jewish law. It took him many hours to 'trebe'(remove) the veins and arteries from the meat even though he knew exactly where to look for each one.

By the time the meat was prepared for his customers, they showed up for their orders. Moishe Bachi bought exactly the right amount of meat each week for his steady customers. If someone wanted a special item like the lungs or kidneys or intestines, they had to come even earlier, and sometimes, it didn't matter how early they came. If the item was on his Cillies' menu for that week, forget it. I learned a lot, hanging around Moishe Bachi's butcher shop. For instance, it seemed to me that even though we paid the same price, the rich man got a better cut of meat. His

portion had more meat and less bone per pound than the poor man's.

Of course, there were other butchers in town, three more, in fact. They did more business than Moishe Bachi, so Mamika did more business with them, figuring that there was a better chance of getting a better piece of meat. Judging from what I saw happening in Moishe Bachi's store, I am sure Mamika was right.

Moishe Bachi enjoyed having his grandchildren and me underfoot. When I wanted to disappear from home, after school and after chores were done, I went to his shop. If anyone asked where I had been, I said, "Around". A young teenager, I was beginning to have independent thoughts.

I did Mamika's meat shopping, and after I brought the meat home, she continued the kashering process, soaking it for half an hour, then placing it on a draining board and salting it. After an hour on the board, she rinsed it off and cooked it. Liver was soaked, also, but then Mamika placed it in the stove on the burning coals to get the impurities out.

A small book held all the records of our grocery shopping in Cillie's store. The Hochmans always knew our financial state, depending on how much we bought on credit. When we reached our credit limit, we asked our tenant, Vaclavé, for an advance on his monthly rental from the furniture factory. Vaclavé, also sometimes short on cash, let us borrow his credit book to buy what we needed. When I was sent on that errand with his book, I felt humiliated. Our neighbors knew that I was buying things for us. As a result, I grew up with a strong distaste for buying anything on credit.

Moishe Bachi came to our house regularly to talk politics with Tatika. Both men had radios and listened faithfully to short wave broadcasts from England. This short bearded man who wore the traditional 'shtraimel' (flat broad brimmed fur hat) worshipped at the Bait Hamidrash, the House of Learning, where the most pious members of the community belonged. As religious as our family was, we belonged to a shul (synagogue) which was also orthodox, but somewhat removed from the very pious. For instance,our rabbi let out his flock earlier on Friday nights, Shabbat, and the High Holidays than did Moishe Bachi's rabbi. In addition, men who belonged to our shul shaved their beards, wore no sidelocks and were in the majority in the community, whereas most of the Bait Hamidrash members had long beards and earlocks.

Every letter from Baila, Moishe Bachi's daughter in America, brought our families together to share her news. By our standards, her family was

well-off, yet Baila sent packages of delicacies that were unavailable in Czechoslovakia. Since we were their only neighbor, we got a full description of the coffee, cocoa, sardines, in tomato sauce, canned foods of all kinds, cigars, and, of course, American nuts (peanuts) that Baila sent. Baila described life in America for her family, relating how fast the Jewish people arriving from Europa prospered, once they threw off the yoke of Judaism. They worked on the Sabbath, something unheard of in our part of the country. Baila's letters and those of others who had left Europa, convinced us that the streets of America were practically littered with gold. No wonder mention of the word, 'America', made us catch our breath with excitement. It meant magic to us. We did hear other less complimentary stories, like the rumors that only hardened criminals went to America, and that everyone there was out to get money from new immigrants, but disregarded them.

When Baila once came to visit, I followed her everywhere. With her impeccable taste and beautiful clothes, she easily stood out among us. The sight of this young woman from another world, from the land of plenty, profoundly affected our townspeople. Mamy wanted to go to America as she had done, but faced serious obstacles to such a move. A person needed a close relative there as a sponsor, plus proof of a sound financial condition so they would not become a burden on the country or a ward of the state.

I believed all the good stories about America. I could not help myself. American motion pictures impressed me so much that I would pretend to be Shirley Temple dressed in stylish clothing with everybody looking after me. Melodies from Jeannette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy movies became so popular that they were heard on the streets long after the moves were shown.

We saw these films at school, where, for a minimum fee that was collected by our homeroom teachers, we went to the movies. Our school system was so supportive of American films that children who could not pay were subsidized and no one ever knew who they were. I can still see myself, wearing my black school uniform, lined up with my classmates by two's in a long line. I always stayed clear of the rear of the line, in case they ran out of seats. I learned early to look out for number one. Afterwards, I did not let the party feeling end. At home, I told my version of the movie to anyone who would listen. I wanted to impress my parents and others older than myself, so when they had had enough, I remember scolding them for not giving me their undivided attention. Luckily my younger sisters were very attentive and could be depended on to provide me with an audience.

Moishe Bachi died on the day when our Jewish people were herded away from their homes. My parents said that he was lucky. "G-d bless his soul", they said. "At last he is at peace. His worries are over." Of his family

of six, his daughter, Barbara, in America, Cillie and Szury survived.

The Shlomovics lived to the right of us. Their grocery store and our house, #1 Podberezna Ulice (street), were on the same side street off Main Street, facing the river. Few people shopped there, and very little merchandise stocked their shelves. The owners, very private people, were ultra-orthodox Jews whose only daughter married a thin young man named Friedman, recommended to them by a 'shadchan' (matchmaker). With his earlocks of long hair combed neatly behind his ears, the young man fit in well with this religious family whose primary concern was the welfare of their only daughter.

The young couple lived in a long narrow room with two beds lined up behind each other. The old parents slept in the kitchen in trundle beds. I was in their house often enough to see them opening those beds and lying down in them. To me, they looked as if they were already lying in their coffins.

Sometimes, the Shlomovics rented their pretty guest room for short periods of time. Other times, the young husband's relatives came to visit and used the room. Otherwise, it was rarely used.

The women did the hard work and the men, after praying three times a day , would occasionally wait on customers. When the young mother took her long walks, proudly pushing the imported English pram in which her son and daughter rode, I walked around town with them. I felt that the young

mother had gotten the short end of the stick in her life. All she knew was work, work, and more work, with no letup.

An archway led to the courtyard of their two facing houses. A rabbi lived in the front three rooms of the second house while a young family occupied the remaining two rooms. The wife, Sheindel, sold locally grown walnuts in a little store in their house. This Jewish lady from Poland suffered from severe headaches, possibly caused by her oddly shaped elongated head. Her eyes looked odd as well, actually popping out of her head. Despite her headaches, she was a wonderful housekeeper whose floors sparkled. They were so clean. When Sheindel's headaches kept her in bed for days at a time, I used to visit her. We were close in age, I at fourteen and she in her early twenties. How well I remember her bedroom and all the pretty things she had. Finally her illness got so bad that a woman was hired to care for Sheindel's child.

Her husband, Hershel, a religious man, prayed in the Temple every day. One cold wintery night, he met with terrible trouble. We Jews knew from experience that the two day Christmas holiday stirred the passions of our non-Jewish neighbors, so we tried our best to be invisible or at least to stay inside, out of their way during that time of year. But sometimes, a religious Jew on his way home from evening prayers became a target in the darkness.

That Christmas Eve was cold and clear. Twinkling stars and a brittle

moon cast their icy glow through the sky. Below, on the snow-covered road, carolling youths colorfully dressed in the holiday costumes of our region caught Herschel and beat him badly. He had no way to defend himself. And we, in our blackened house, were helpless as well. All we could do was stay inside in the dark and watch as those hooligans did their dirty work on a defenseless man. They hit him and pulled on his beard and his hair locks until their thirst for inflicting pain was satisfied. Finally,they kicked him until he lay motionless on the frozen ground and they had had their fill. To get ahold of a Jew and let him have it lifted their holiday spirits and they went off laughing and jostling one another. When the street was clear, our men picked Herschel up and brought him home to his ailing, frightened wife. And she said, "Baruch Hashem" (Thank G-d), "It could have been worse."

In 1943, the Hungarian government passed their first deportation order, a decree ordering all Polish-born Jews or Polish Jews married to Czech citizens to come to the main square and bring their offspring as well. Sheindel and her child were taken away from that square, never to be heard from again.

Several days later, a man who appeared to be deranged, ran around our neighborhood telling stories about how he was one of those people who had left town to return to Poland. He said that they were forced to dig ditches and then they were lined up in those ditches and were shot to

death, innocent men, women and children whose only sin was to have been born to Jewish parents. He was the only survivor. We thought he had lost his mind. Nobody took him seriously..

The Rebbe and his wife who lived in the three front rooms of that long house in Sheindel's courtyard used one room for a 'cheder' (school). Another room served as their personal living quarters. The front door opened directly into the middle room, their kitchen. To the left of the kitchen in the cheder, the longest table I had ever seen dominated the room, stretching from wall to wall between two narrow wooden benches.

The kitchen held the biggest oven in town. Like the cheder, it was a public place so benches were placed all around the room. Many people came here, students and people like us, who, every Friday, brought at least two earthen pots full of food to be cooked for a small fee. Our 'cholent'(a kind of stew) was placed in the oven on Friday afternoon and stayed there baking slowly until we came for it Saturday afternoon. According to our custom, we did not kindle fire nor do any manual work on the Sabbath. Friday afternoons, before Shabbat, a steady stream of women or young girls brought cholent to the Rebbe's house while the boys and their fathers studied in the cheder with the Rebbe.

We never knew how the cholent would come out. If the oven was too hot, then it burned and there was not much to eat that Shabbat day. If the oven wasn't hot enough, the food was half cooked and inedible. Usually, one pot contained beef, barley, beans and potatoes, flavored with onions, salt and pepper. The other pot held a potato 'kuchel' (pudding) and a 'helzel' (chicken or goose skin filled with flour, fat, and small pieces of skin with meat on them-gribines) that was placed in the middle of the pudding. Most of the time, we fared well with a scrumptious noon meal that we washed down with Svaljava's mineral water, to aid digestion.

Every Pesach (Passover), the Rebbe made 'charoses' (a mixture of grated apples, walnuts and wine) to be used during the 'Seder' (ritual meal). Rebbe Shmoel made enough charoses for his neighbors for both Seders. He doled it out according to the size of the families.

This pious Jew radiated goodness. His students were his life. When they excelled in their studies, his face shone with happiness. Their melodic young voices came from that one-room school six days a week, year after year, as far back as I can remember. Each child wore a 'yarmulke' (skullcap) over his shaved head, with locks of hair hanging down on each side of their heads. With their 'tzitzit' (fringes) hanging down from their waists, they so resembled Biblical children that time seemed to stand still in Svaljava.

The large spacious room to the right of the kitchen housed Rebbe

Shmoel's study, his wife, Rachel's, sewing area, their dining and sleeping areas, all carefully arranged with everything in its place. On Shabbat, candles were lit and all activity ceased. Peace prevailed. On Shabbat morning, the pious couple went to the Beit Hamidrash where the very religious worshipped. We had to wait for them to return so that we could get our cholent from their oven. Still wearing her best clothes, the 'Rebbitzen' (Rebbe's wife) opened the oven and removed the pots of cholent. When a youngster came to fetch the pot, the Rebbetzin knew exactly which pot to give her. She would say, Here, Rifkala, Surelle, or Chavelle, "Do main kint dos dein teppelle." (Here, my child. This is your pot.) We were so rich then. Only now, looking back do I realize how precious those times were, a time and place which is gone forever, never to be again.

Three years after Sarah, Mamika's last child, Chavah, was born, the only child who was not called by her Yiddish name. I don't know why, but we called this dark eyed blonde with long eyelashes, Eva or Evike, her nickname. Dudi would look at her sweet heart shaped face, and ask for a kiss, saying, "Evike, Gib mier ein patcel."

I felt like a mother toward my two youngest sisters. They were my charge and I carried them with me in my arms whenever I went out to play. Mamika had so much work to do that it was simply a matter of who could do what had to be done.

When Baby Evike came down with smallpox, the people in charge of

communicable diseases plastered our house with posters warning people not to enter. Mamika cared for Evika around the clock, singing songs and rocking the cradle. She hovered between life and death until, finally, to our tremendous relief and joy, she responded. That near loss made her even more precious to us all. In spite of all the attention she got, Evika was unspoiled. She let you love her and she loved in return.

I was assigned to take Evika and Surika to kindergarten at different times in their lives, and made sure they were all right before I left them. One spring, Evike took part in a school play. She wore a mushroom outfit, and tied under her chin was a tiny round red cap made of shiny red paper with white dots on it. It was such a special time for us that Mamika was there, too. Evika delighted us all, and nobody was jealous of her.

Tatika adored this tiny child who could have grown up to be a beauty. But, that was not to be.

Sarah was not as pretty as youngest sister and I often wondered what went on in her mind. She and I seemed to have a lot in common. I was the second child, a girl between two boys, first-born Dudi, whom Mamika adored, and Benci, the rebellious one. Then along came beautiful Rifka. So I automatically drew to Saralle. She was a good little girl who never fussed over anything,and was satsfied with whatever came her way. She shone with an inner beauty all her own. I loved her dearly and took care of her as if I were her mother. When food was scarce, and very precious, the little

ones were always fed first. My turn was way down the ladder. Szurelle and I did not need to communicate. I only had to look her way and she shared whatever little she had with me. I will never forget the time Tatika brought home some chocolates. That was a big day in our lives. I was not home when everybody got his share, but as soon as Szurelle saw me, she came over to me and broke off a piece for me. I knew she would have enjoyed every little crumb of it.

Olga, a crippled teenager, lived on Main Street. She suffered what we called 'the American disease', polio, and was lovingly cared for by her family. Whenever they brought her outside for a change of scenery, we children ran after her specially designed carriage. We talked to her, touching her frail limp hands. I remember long legged Szurelle handing her a bouquet of bright autumn leaves. As she reached out to hand them to Olga, Szurelle fell down, injuring herself, and didn't cry or complain. I can still see my little sister, as she was that day, her short hair fastened to one side with a bobby pin, her eyes crossed as she braved out her pain.

This quiet little person turned into a stone when we arrived in Auschwitz. When Joseph Mengele lined us up, five in a row, she had such a grip on me. Not a sound came out of her. That stare and that grip told me how frightened she was. This sweet child who never harmed anybody did not live to be eleven years old. What a sister she might have been to me!

And what a difference that genuinely unselfish human being might have made in the world!

Can anyone imagine multiplying this child, one and a half million times? What an impact these children had on us. Ever since then, I cannot bear to see a child suffer. Their pain reaches into the very core of me and becomes unbearable. I would give my life to help a child in distress.

Benci's high energy level caused him many problems. A happy busy child, he could not sit still for long, so he reaped more than his share of kneeling on hard dried corn kernels, or lashings with a stick, typical punishments meted out by his teacher. Other times, the teacher used a ruler, slapping it against the palms of Benci's hands. The school principal also kept a steady eye on him, until Benci, as clever as he was mischievous, realized that he had to reform. Then, things started going his way.

Nonsense was not tolerated at home. If we misbehaved, we paid the price. Tatika did not mince words. All he had to do was take off his 'reman' (belt). The rest was history. You got what you deserved and then some. Of course, we were angry at him for awhile. Sometimes, we forgot our anger by the time Mamika called us for a meal. Other times, pride would not let us forgive and forget the beating we had received and we remained aloof until Tatika sounded apologetic. We continued to pout, but, eventually, all was forgotten, until the next time. Once one of us turned

sixteen, the physical punishment ceased altogether.

Leib Duvid, Dudie for short, had an altogether different relationship with our parents. They were hardly out of their teens and had had very little time to get to know each other when their first son arrived. Mamika was so enthralled with Dudie that she devoted all her time and attention to him. This delicate, sickly child had pneumonia twice and by the time he was four years old, cranky, fussy Dudie had my father at his wits' end. Tatika once picked him up and threw him up in the air so high that Dudie hit the ceiling. Tatika did it to knock some sense into him and to let Mamika know how he felt about the entire situation.

I often felt that my arrival in the family placed a huge burden on both Mamika and Dudie. I felt unwanted and unwelcome. So, when I thought Dudie got too much attention, I found a way to get even. I simply bit him on his back.

At night, Dudie and I slept on the divan ~~located between~~ (at the foot of) my parents' bed in the dining room table. My sickly brother needed nourishment day and night so Mamika mixed milk with chicory coffee and placed the cup on the edge of the table within his reach. Since he was the frail one, he slept on the inside of the divan and I slept on the outside. Half asleep, he reached for his coffee milk and I got soaked. At first, I didn't know what hit me. I dared not make any noise and wake my hard working parents. I had only one choice, to plead my case. I told them; either he stops the nightly

showers or he sleeps on the outer side of the divan. We switched places and the showers ended.

No one slept alone in our house. When Benci came along, he slept with Dudie. Later, I slept with Rifka. Surika slept at Mamika's feet. And when Evika awoke crying in her crib, Mamika simply took her into her own bed and rocked her to sleep,in order to have a peaceful night. My parents didn't know about psychology. They just did whatever worked.

Dudie was expected to succeed, and his good behaviour and excellent schoolwork lived up to our parents' expectations. He continued having health problems, such as his nosebleeds that gushed like an open faucet. The doctors tried every possible remedy from ice packs to pinching his nostrils together until, at last, cauterization worked.

In addition to the usual childhood diseases, all six of us were prone to attacks of toncilitis, sore throats and viral infections. Mamika had us wear cotton stockings filled with hot sand around our necks. If no specific symptoms identified our ailment, a strand of fresh garlic adorned our necks, to ward off evil demons. Frequent stomach aches bothered the infants because beans were the main staple of our diet.

Mamika nursed us all and other children as well. I remember watching her pump her breasts for a neighborhood child whose mother could not nurse the infant. I stood there in amazement. Life was simple and very real.

Miserably sick with tonsilitis, a sky-high fever and excruciating pain

that clenched my throat, I remember being put to bed in the cold d[redacted] kitchen covered with the 'poch perenyes' (down blankets). Mamika checked my progress by placing her hand on my forehead. The best part of being sick was tasting the pear and plum preserves that Mamika had canned the previous summer. I loved her raspberry syrup mixed with mineral water, blueberry jam on bread, and tomato juice, put up in small jars for stuffed cabbage sauce.

Tatika was out of town when Rifkala became very sick. Mamika seemed helpless with fear as Rifka went into convulsions. I ran out of the house, yelling for help, not knowing who could respond. Our good neighbor, Szury Naini, Moishe Bachi's daughter, heard my cries and came to help.

During a terrible swine-flu epidemic, I was the only one in our family to become ill. The epidemic affected so many people that health oficials rounded up all the sick people and confined them to a special city-run makeshift infirmary in order to prevent further spread of the disease. I was sick for a full month before the flu started to subside. On the day that the health officials, wearing armbands with a red cross on a white background, came to see me, my parents had to decide whether or not to let them take me away. My fever was high but I knew what was happening around me. I decided to give them a show while I lay there. Feigning sleep, with my eyes closed, I thrust my arms straight up in the air. As they saw what was happening to me, Mamika said, "Dos kind gait nish nergits. Keek nabich

was se tit sech mit eihr." (The child is not going anywhere. Look at the poor thing, what is happening to her.) I recovered happily, at home.

The circus came to Svaljava every summer. I loved it. The summer I was ten, I found out the exact time it was expected to arrive and met them at the train station. Mesmerized by the entire event, I even forgot to go home to eat. I quickly learned that the show would begin as soon as the big tent was up. Immediately, I began scheming up ways for Dudie and Benci and me to get in without paying. When showtime was announced, I ran home to do my chores, concentrating all the while on my problem.

After dinner, we three got permission to go to see the rides, and animals. All the way there, we tried to figure out how to get in without money. We decided that girls probably wouldn't be punished too severly if they got caught, so I should try first. The boys picked up the canvas side so that I could crawl under it. Once inside, I made sure the coast was clear. Then I lifted the canvas and let them in. We were not the only ones with the idea and the seats quickly filled. The excitement under the tent became almost unbearable. Then the show began and we thought we were in the clear.

Suddenly, the fortune teller appeared onstage and said, "I know exactly who paid and who did not." As soon as he spoke, youngsters started running out of the place from all directions. Dudie and Benci almost joined them, but I sat there calming them down by saying, "Let's first see

if that is so." We were sitting near the middle of the tent. After the last child ran out, the ringmaster said, "Now, we can go on with the show." We remained and had a wonderful time.

We could literally smell the circus when it came to town. I remember once, running out of the house, leaping over the stairs and promptly falling on my face in my rush to see it. Tatika saw what had happened to me and got so scared that, instead if trying to help me, he became angry with me for not using my head. He hit me, adding humiliation to the pain of my bruised knees. I was an angry nine-year-old, crying with pain and embarrassment, and remained angry with him all day long. I knew that he felt sorry for what he did, but the damage was done.

Our lives revolved around the Sabbath and the Jewish holidays. The Sabbath, according to Jewish law, is considered the holiest of holy days except for Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement). The Sabbath held such magic for us, with our entire family involved in the preparations for it.

We began on Thursday evening when Mamika brought large wooden bowls out of their storage places. She boiled and mashed potatoes to use as the softening agent for the Shabbat challah (braided bread) and sweet dough poppy seed cakes and danish.

A shochet (specialist in ritual killing) slaughtered a goose for us on Thursdays during the winter months. He was specially trained to inflict the least amount of pain on an animal. Once I brought a chicken to him to

be killed. The man did his job, cleaned the area where he had cut the bird and threw it into the field to thrash about until it died. I thought it took too long for the bird to die and told the shochet that it bothered me. I asked why he didn't cut it again to end its agony. He answered that another cut would be against Jewish law. Had my family raised the chicken, he wanted to know. When I said we had, he explained that since I had helped to raise it, I hated to see it die.

I brought the poor creature home but my job did not end there. I had to pluck its feathers. Then Mamika took over. She lit a fire under the chicken to burn off the remaining feathers, cut the bird open and threw away the digestive organs. She saved the liver, heart, giblet and neck, removed two small arteries from the neck, cut off the edge of the heart and split it open. Then she cut off the feet and the toe nails. When the chicken was prepared, Mamika completed the kashering process, by soaking it in a bowl of water for half an hour and salting it for an hour. Last step in the process was washing off the salt and the chicken was ready to be cooked.

Geese were kashered the same way. Force-fed geese like ours, had to have their stomachs examined by the Rebbe. If he found any kind of blemish that could not be removed, the bird was pronounced not kosher (unclean) and we could not use it. Our Sabbath meals hung on the Rebbe's decision. By that time, the butchers had already sold their meat for the week.

Sometimes, we rushed to a neighboring town for meat at the last moment. Somehow, we felt, G-d helped.

If the goose passed inspection, Mamika removed and cooked all its fat until it was completely melted. Pieces of goose meat and skin cooked with the fat became crispy 'gribines', a treat that we ate alone or mixed into mashed potatoes or spread on bread. Sometimes, Mamika made delicious liver pate or roasted the liver with garlic and paprika. Our usual Thursday night dinner was cabbage soup with gribines pate and baked potatoes. (My mouth waters as I describe it.)

Late in the fall of the year we prepared cabbage for the winter. We bought sacks of fresh cabbages from a local farmer, and lined the big shredder. Then my fun began. Tatika put the cabbage into the barrel alternating whole leaves for the stuffed cabbage Mamika made for every Friday night, and then the shredded cabbage. Yours truly had her feet thoroughly washed before I was lowered into the barrel to press down the cabbage layers with my bare feet. This went on until all the cabbage was shredded. Then I was hoisted up out of the barrel, so salt and pepper corns could be added for pickling.

Besides stuffed cabbage, Mamika made cabbage soup, cabbage and beans, cabbage and noodles, and sauteed cabbage with onions. From the goose, she made a sweet rich soup that she served with noodles. From flour, eggs and salt, Mamika kneaded and rolled, dried and cut her specialty—noodles,

paper-thin for soup, or wide strips for cabbage dishes. She made everything from scratch, never using a recipe.

We had no salads during the winter and early spring, because we had to wait for the Rumanian farmers to bring their vegetables to market in the summertime. Sometimes it was a long long wait . During the summer we ate fresh vegetables, some beef, veal and lamb. Not until fall did we begin to fatten the geese for the winter.

Force feeding the geese was a family task. Mamika partially boiled corn in oil to soften the kernels. While the corn cooled, Dudie and I brought the geese, two at a time, from their cage in the barn to Mamika who sat on a cushion on the kitchen floor. She held those geese under her legs and forced a handful of soft corn kernels down their throats twice a day until their stomachs bulged. The geese grew so fat they could barely move, let alone struggle. Then came the part I hated, the trip to the shochet and back. Then I helped Mamika pluck each smelly feather which we carefully washed and stored for our winter work. Every Saturday evening, all winter long, the neighborhood women got together for 'fluder flicken' (feather flicking), each with her own sack of feathers that had to be separated from their stems. Those were warm gossipy evenings when Mamika talked about her four daughters and all the bedding we would need, someday. The precious goose down eventually became the filling for our pillows and soft perenyes (covers).

These are sweet memories of good people, who worked each day in their own way, hoping and striving for better times ahead. We all wanted only peace on earth and a chance to better ourselves, free from fear and discrimination. Some of our people were so faithful and believed so strongly in the power of the Almighty that they took on the appearance of sainthood. But it took a holy man who practiced Judaism to the letter who had the power to perform miracles.

The Vereckier Rebbe was such a man. Before Mamika agreed to surgery, she travelled to this holy man in the city of Vereckier, for his blessing. He assured her that the operation would go well and that she need have no fear. After seeing him, she bravely underwent a hysterectomy at the famous Jewish Hospital in Budapest, Hungary. Tatika returned home afterwards confident that Mamika would return to us safe and sound. Later, she described to us how a living, moving tree outside her hospital window stood as a symbol of her recovery as she hovered between life and death. The Rebbe had strengthened her faith and recover she did.

I witnessed an event that convinced me further of the powers these holy men possessed. A young man, perhaps in his thirties, collapsed while walking on our street. He lay paralyzed on the ground while people gathered around. Someone ran for the Rebbe who arrived with his two sons. This tall, bearded, black suited man, his head covered by the traditional yarmulke, stood by the unconscious man reciting a blessing for the sick.

Then his two young sons bent down and picked up the motionless man. As they raised him to his feet, he slowly walked, truly a miracle wrought by our Rebbe.

Another time, a Jewish man accused of harming a Christian family, went to see his Rebbe, a holy man. On hearing the story, the Rebbe advised him that he had been falsely accused and should go home in peace. Justice would prevail. He left the Rebbe, greatly relieved. On the day of the court hearing, a driver and his horse drawn cart came to take the man and the judge to court. The lawyer and his phony witnesses followed in a second wagon. According to the story, the Jew, the judge and their driver suddenly heard a frightening sound behind them. They turned to see an incredible sight. The horse pulling the second wagon keeled over onto the wagon, instantly killing the lawyer and the phony witnesses. The judge declared the case dismissed. Many more such stories, some going back to the Baal Shem Tov* were orally transmitted from generation to generation in our area.

Purim interrupted the long cold winter. On this holiday, our families read the Megillah (story of Queen Esther) at home. Wonderful aromas filled our neighborhood as every Jewish housewife baked sweet pastries for 'Shalakhmones' (gifts of sweets traditionally given to friends). We had hamentashen (triangular shaped raised dough pastries) filled with prune butter, sponge cakes, honey cakes, and kindelech (cookie dough filled with

* shalakhmones

honey, nuts, sweet wine and raisins). Mamika rolled out the kindelech dough in a circle, filled it, then rolled it into a jelly roll which she cut in half. She cut half inch pieces around each half, resembling children's toes, and named them. "Dus is far Evike, Szurike, Rifchuka, Bencike, Lajczuka, und Dudika." (This is for...)

Men attended morning religious services and afterwards, we children visited each other's homes dressed in the costumes of Queen Esther, King Ahashveres or evil Haman, the main characters of the Purim story. We recited poems and were free to elaborate by including curent times and characters. Our Purim afternoon feast or Sida, started with a triple decker raisin cholie and was followed by stuffed cabbage and roast veal. Gypsies, dressed in their finest clothes, came too, playing 'cigoiner' (gypsy) tunes on their violins. Our parents paid them for their serenade and gave them sweets to eat.

Spring followed Purim and, in Czechoslovakia, spring brought excitement. Melting mountain snow swelled the river in front of our house. As it came roaring to life, mountainous icebergs floated by. Our parents spent many nervous nights, watching the river and the floes in case we would have to evacuate. All of nature awakened from the winter sleep. Singing birds returned. We helped tiny chicks and geese to hatch from their shells in the barn, and kept them warm in a covered box in the kitchen. As they grew stronger, my brothers and I let them out of the box.

What fun we had when the fuzzy chicks and geese ran underfoot in our kitchen, pecking for their corn mush and water. All too soon, Mamika said, "Enough", and we had to take them out to their mothers in the barn.

Passover preparations began the day after Purim. The winter's cooking and wood-burning left dark stains on the interior of the house, so our custom was to paint it for Passover. Painters were engaged and the household turned upside down. Windows and doors were opend so the chill March air could dispell the unpleasant fresh paint odor. Every corner of the house was scrubbed. Every piece of clothing was cleaned by hand. My job was to clean a wool coat, so I took it outside where I 'dry cleaned' it by brushing it clean with freshly fallen snow. Huge buckets of water boiled on the stove for washing linens. We washed clothes in oval wooden tubs, scrubbing them on a washing board with harsh, home-made soap. In time, Mamika hired a woman to help with this spring ritual. Everything was washed twice, bleached in tubs of boiling liquid, then taken down to the river for rinsing. ~~Sometimes,~~ ALWAYS bluish starch was added to the white sheets and mens shirts before they were hung outside on clotheslines to dry. Nothing ever smelled as fresh as those linens, dried in the cold spring mountain air.

After the painting and the laundry came washing the beds with naftaline against bed bugs. The old straw was emptied out of our burlap mattress sacks so they could be filled with fresh straw Tatika bought from

local farmers who carefully stored wheat stalks for this purpose. Those farmers made plenty of money every spring from all the Jewish families who were cleaning house for Passover.

The messiest spring job was replacing the down pillows and puffs. New ticking cloth was measured, sewn, and tightly filled with down or the mixed down and feathers we had carefully prepared during the winter. As years passed by, we accumulated enough bedding so that down filled puffs covered our parents' straw-filled mattress sacks. That was living! After the puffs were finished, we washed and colored and polished the floors for Mamika's new hand-made runners.

Most important of all the Passover preparations was cleaning the kitchen. Every dish, board and pot was specially scrubbed. Mamika's wooden cholie bowls were washed in the river. We weighed them down by piling stones in them. After they had soaked, we scrubbed them with brushes to make sure no 'chametz' (yeast dough) remained. Only then were they taken up to the attic to remain until after Pesach was over. All the everyday dishes and pots were washed, scrubbed and stored this way, and it all took place in four weeks time.

Special care was taken with all the foods we used during this holiday. We were allowed only matzo, potatoes, milk, sugar, eggs, nuts, meat, wine, shmaltz (animal or goose fat), and vegetables not belonging to any bean family. Our cows ate no grain before or during Passover. The unleavened

bread, matzo, was baked under rabbinical supervision. Since Passover always fell in the early spring, we had few choices and ate mostly meat and potatoes.

The night before the First Seder, we searched the house for 'chametz' (leavened bread). This ceremony involved gathering the pieces of bread that had been purposefully placed in each room. Tatika gathered them with a feather and a lit candle, then wrapped together. Tatika would say, "May all leaven in my possession which I have not seen or removed be regarded as non-existent and considered as mere dust of the earth." After breakfast the next morning, he burned the leaven. At this point, the house was considered kosher for Passover.

Mamika had to have breakfast over by ten o'clock so that she could remove the last 'chumatz' dishes, and bring the Passover plates down from the attic for washing. The sight of those colorful mismatched dishes and earthenware pots thrilled us because we each had our own favorite dish. Our excitement grew as the hours passed. We knew that the holiday was upon us. Mamika stored the dishes on kitchen shelves now completely covered by new wood shingles, as long and thin as needed. The transformation was complete. Our sparkling clean house smelled fresh and outdoorsy, ready for Passover.

We were so hungry that day that we could barely wait to be fed. I remember that we always ate potato pancakes during the day of the First

Seder. Mamika mixed grated potatoes and onions with eggs and shaped them into latkes that she fried in goose fat. Each of us older kids could eat the entire contents of a ten inch fry pan. They were so delicious! Later on, in the worst times of my life, I could actually recreate the sights and sounds and smells of Mamika's Passover kitchen. Crispy potato latkes fried in the kitchen of my mind while my body wasted away for lack of food.

Elaborate preparations continued for the Seder, the ritual meal in which we retold the story of the Jews being slaves in Egypt. The Passover tradition requires each Jew to tell his children the story, as if he or she were there personally, thus commemorating our freedom from slavery. When our Seder finally began, Mamika continued running back and forth to the kitchen, making sure nothing was omitted.

White damask covered the table. Silver candelabra, sparkling glasses of sweet grape wine, the ceremonial plate with the ritual foods, and the beautiful Matzo cover embroidered by Tatika's sister, Naini Blima, made our table as beautiful as possible. What memories! Tatika reclined on a white damask pillow and chanted the Passover passages. Dudie, the oldest, asked the "Maneshtanah". (Why is this night different from all other nights?) We ate bitter herbs like horseradish, and moror made of nuts, apples and wine, foods designed to emphasize the bitterness of slavery for our people. Then Mamika served her wonderful hot beet soup with tiny boiled potatoes, roast goose, potato latkes, dried cooked fruit, tea with lemon and nut

cake. I'll never forget the sight of my father and brothers sitting close together chanting the ancient songs of the 'Hagaddah'(the Passover story). When Elijah's cup was filled and the door opened for him, my brothers and sisters and I really expected him to enter. That was how caught up we were in the spirit of this holy day. Right after the meal, my exhausted Mamika and the little ones went directly to bed. At the age of eleven, I, the eldest daughter, was awarded the clean-up job.

Next morning, the men folk went to Temple dressed in their new Passover clothing. The poorest people wore something new and we were no exception. I put on new clothes too, from the skin out, and went to show off to my neighbors, taking care not to dirty my new shoes.

For breakfast, we ate matzo and milk. Lunch was more latkes, and for a snack, we ate matzo rubbed with garlic and goose fat. For the second Seder, we had goose soup, boiled goose and roast goose. For all eight days, we ate no (CHUMATS bread) and the day after Passover, all the holiday dishes were returned to their attic resting place until the next year, 'mercheshem' (G-d willing).

Our busy household routine began early each morning. Shortly after sun-up, Tatika got up, washed his face and hands and shaved his beard with a wooden blade and shaving cream. He and Dudie put the phylactary on their foreheads and left wrists for their morning prayers every day but Shabbat and holy days. Then Tatika wore his talis (prayer shawl) and they prayed

in the Temple.

My morning chores were hardest on Fridays when floors needed washing for the Sabbath. At five when Mamika woke me, she already had yellowish hot water boiling on the stove. After everything was moved to one side of the kitchen, I scrubbed the floor with a bristle brush and rinsed it with clear water. And in my bare feet, year round, I took the dirty water outside. The cold snow burned my feet like fire in winter, but it was a job I had to do. I hated and dreaded it.

While I was doing the floor, Mamika had dough rising, and by sun-up the kitchen smelled of chickory and real coffee beans which she ground together to make our breakfast brew. We grew up on oven fresh 'pletzlah' (flat bread) and coffee diluted with freshly boiled milk that I fetched from the farmer. Mamika worked feverishly to have the little ones ready on time. They left for school right after breakfast. Dudie had to catch a train to Mukachevo where he attended the Hebrew Gymnasium (upper school). Meanwhile, I washed and dressed, got my lunch and off I went. Rain, snow, sleet or bitter cold did not keep me home from my two-mile trek to school.

I was always amazed that Mamika could do everything so matter of factly and so well. She sang Hungarian songs as she went about her work, creating a peaceful atmosphere in the house. She relied on me all the time, but was not the type to praise a job well done. She took that for granted. How could I complain when I saw how hard she worked and how much

there was to do.

My school day lasted from eight in the morning until five in the afternoon. To qualify from the fifth grade to "Mnyeshtanka" (junior high school), we took oral exams in geometry, algebra formulas, chemistry, math and German. Teachers of those subjects tested us in order to eliminate overcrowding in the school for higher learning. Students who failed the exams remained in elementary school for another three years. I attended the Mnyeshtanka for five years, the equivalent of five years of gymnasium. (Additional testing was required for gymnasium admission, both to accommodate the better students and to control enrollment.)

I loved school and proudly wore my blue school uniform and carried a briefcase and my prized drawing board encased between blue cardboard panels, tied with black laces and a handle. This drawing case, I knew, set me apart from the ordinary student. I worshipped the ground my teachers walked on and talked for days about my visits to their homes. But I never discussed those visits with my school friends for fear of envy and the chance that it would hurt our friendships.

Six weeks after Passover, we decorated our house and gate with birch branches for Shavuoth, the holiday on which we read the story of Ruth and the handing down of the Ten Commandments. Dairy foods were eaten to symbolize a beginning and the purity of the times. Spring brought blossoming flowers and the annual outhouse cleanup. Everybody hired

gypsies to carry human waste to grazing field and the winter accumulation of chicken compost to the gardens. I ran as far away as possible to escape the stench when this operation was underway.

Near our house, the city kept several bulls. Each spring, farmers brought their young cows to be impregnated. High walls didn't keep us from watching what went on. The minute a bull saw a cow, he ran towards her as if shot out of a cannon. If the first attempt did not take, the farmer brought back his cow for a second try. We watched as the farmers and the peasants worked their deals. Before long, the cows would swell, their udders heavy with milk. Immediately after birth, the calf reached for the udder and the pinkish milk that gradually turned yellow, another fascinating development.

In the barn, we busily rescued baby chicks from being trampled by the mother hens who sometimes objected to our interfering by pecking us. We fed our chickens and geese sweet yellow corn. As a result, their meat was sweet and juicy. We had a goat because goat's milk was supposed to be good for growing children. I loved the warm foaming milk and never objected to its peculiar taste. As soon as our goat stopped giving milk, she was sold. Soon after birthing, when the young goat was weaned, it was sold. Our cat, too, had litters every spring. We begged our parents to let us keep the kittens, but inevitably, the day came when unwanted cats were sent down the river in one of our cotton stockings. One cat per family kept the rat

population under control.

Our educational system was designed to prepare us for life, so basic practical skills were taught in addition to academic subjects. For instance, girls learned how to sew a baby layette by hand in case no sewing machine was available. Agricultural skills were taught outdoors in the plot of land behind our schoolyard. After instruction in fertilizing and preparing the soil for planting, we planted onions, radishes, carrots, lettuce and potatoes, and brought our new knowledge of the land home to use in our own gardens. When the vegetables matured, we were taught how to prepare them in the school's basement kitchen. Cooking and baking, sewing, knitting, running a sewing machine and crocheting were all included in our curriculum. To us, the teacher was G-d and we worked hard to please each one.

To this day I remember the trouble I had learning to crochet. Mamika gave up on me and Tatika took over. He got me so bamboozled from sheer fear that I mastered it. He never let me forget it. He would ask, "Lajcsu, who taught you to crochet?" And he loved to hear me say, "You did, Tatika."

Our teachers took great care to respect each child's beliefs. They used vegetable shortening, never lard, in cooking classes, lest they offend the Jewish students. We were encouraged to bring eggs, flour and sugar to school for the cookies or breads that we baked. This practice gave less

fortunate children an opportunity to contribute something instead of being limited to the receiving end of charity. We derived a tremendous sense of well being and belonging when we shared the foods we made with our school friends and saw how happy it made them.

When I was sixteen, my dearest friend, Yolanda Panykovich and I often studied together in her quiet warm house. We shared our secret dreams and plans for the future. Her grandparents, with whom she lived, liked me and felt that I was a good influence on their granddaughter. Good Roman Catholics, they respected my faith to the extent that when I visited, they offered me only foods they knew I could eat, like nuts, fruits and seeds, and expressed their pleasure when I accepted their generosity. How good they made me feel! Yolanda was hopelessly in love with a young man who totally ignored her. I commiserated with her and told her such a thing would never happen to me. I had too much to do at home and, besides, Jewish girls did not marry as young as Gentile girls.

Within two years time, life became so uncertain for us Jews that we could not afford to indulge our fantasies no matter how personal. Life seemed to stand still for us and a sense of restlessness set in among our young people. We felt caged in with no place to go and no hope for ourselves. All kinds of rumors flew. One day, I found myself in the marketplace with hundreds of other eighteen year olds, waiting for something to happen. Nothing did. Rumors circulated that all Jewish girls

must report to the marketplace to be drafted into the armed forces. I was disappointed when it was revealed as a hoax, but I was also worried that I might not be taken because I had a hip problem that I had not grown out of. Mamika told me that mine had been a difficult delivery and that I had had trouble learning to steady myself when I began to walk. In time, my perseverance paid off. My muscles strengthened and I could do whatever my contemporaries did, albeit a little slower. I knew I was different from my friends and usually it didn't matter. But when other children made cruel remarks about my gait, it hurt my feelings.

One unpleasant school incident sticks in my mind. One girl taunted me so that I told my mother who led me by the hand to Magda's house where she confronted her and her mother. Like a mother bear protecting her cub, she related the incident and then compared our looks.

Look at you, "Du bist a soi mies vil'DER schwartzer yuer." (You are as ugly as the black devil.) Then she turned to me and said, "Look at Lajcsu, look at her shapely legs, her beautiful eyes, her smile, her beautiful skin, small waist, beautiful arms and she is good and smart. Let's go home." We left the house and she started to cry. Right then I vowed never to show her my pain or cause her any pain. So I never told her about my awful dream in which Tatika died. Not until after the war when a former neighbor confirmed our father's death did I reveal the premonition I had had so long before.

After the Magda incident, I walked very proudly and started to admire the attributes Mamika had enumerated. She gave me a strength that remains with me to this day. When problems get me down, I am able to rise above them, thanks to a deep inner resource she nurtured.

For most people, the school year ended in June. But the cheder and yeshiva (Jewish religious schools) continued, oblivious to the summer. Four days a week, a different young boy in short pants with tzitzit (fringed garment) hanging from his waist, came to our home for his afternoon meal. The yeshiva students went home for the Sabbath and holidays and returned on Sundays with clean clothes and bundles of food. Long side locks and shaven heads identified them as yeshiva boys who spent their days in serious, disciplined study of the Torah (Five Books of Moses). The Rebbe tolerated no disruptive behavior.

As the summer progressed, locally grown fruits, vegetables and poultry became available. Farmers brought raspberries, strawberries, blueberries, plums, apples and pears to market along with their chickens and eggs. Mamika explained to us that the peasants worked long hours to pick the berries and had to be satisfied with the money they received for them in the market. They worked hard in all kinds of weather to support their large families.

We bought milk from a Greek Orthodox family whose lifestyle was typical in our area. They shared their house with the pigs that were the

source of their livlihood. One pig slaughtered during the winter provided food for months because every part of the animal was utilized. The skin became leather garments. The lard was smoked and eaten all winter, supplying strength for their heavy cold outdoor work. They made Colbasa by filling the pigs' intestines with liver, onions, garlic and spices- no preservatives. The pigs grew fat on potatoes mixed with corn mush, garbage from the kitchens of well-to-do families, and leftovers from the vegetable market. Only when the pig was so fat it could hardly stand on its feet was it killed.

The average peasant lived on corn, potatoes, a few other vegetables, some fruit, his pigs, and the extras he could afford after doing an occasional day's labor during the long winter months. Sugar, coffee, salt and white flour were available. If the peasant had a good winter and managed to work steadily, his family would be well dressed for Easter. The Greek Orthodox family made most of their own clothing, like the shirts and vests they embroidered in red, white and blue, our national colors.

In general, the Jewish people and the peasant population complemented each other. We provided commerce. They provided farm products. In business, there seemed to be a mutual respect and we rarely heard of any one group taking advantage of the other. But, if there were envy over the relative prosperity of the Jewish people, their nicer homes and better living conditions, it would not surprise me.

When my older brother, Dudie, turned thirteen, he was called up to the Aron Kodesh for his Bar Mitzvah (like a confirmation). "Leib Duvid ben Zalman", called out the Rebbe, and Dudie walked up to the Bima(podium) and received an Aliyah (the blessing he then recited) before the Rebbe chanted the Torah portion for the week. At the conclusion of the morning services, Dudie was considered to be a man in the eyes of G-d and men, responsible to observe Halacha, Mitzvot, and Commandments (religious observances and perform good deeds and blessings). The congregation, consisting entirely of men, were served Slivovitz and eijer kichelech (a strong plum whiskey and egg cookies). His was a traditional Bar Mitzvah, simple and without hoopla, and when it was over, he continued to study and to live his religious beliefs day after day as was our custom.

As time went on, and our financial situation improved, our lives changed in subtle ways. In the hot summertime,our parents had time for a siesta following the early afternoon dinner. Tatika was no longer the angry man I knew as a child. His interest in our activities grew, and he delighted in our accomplishments. When any of us brought home an 'A' on a report card, he proudly showed it to his customers. Every rose or wild flower I painted was put on display.

Family life became comfortable for us, perhaps because our parents saw that we were good children, and reflected their good work with us. Mamika and Tatika were always in charge, and we learned to respect their

authority. Respect for each other and for other peoples and properties was part of our home education.

The chickens thrived in the summer, and were soon marked for slaughter. Each week, on Thursdays, Mamika invaded the chicken coop, caught two young roosters, tied their legs together, and handed them to me to take to the Shochet. They were to be our Shabbat meal. Every farm child knows the awful feeling I had in the pit of my stomach when I looked at those poor chickens. Did they know how I felt? Did they sense how confused I was by this terrible thing I was forced to do? Was it right to do this? That journey always lasted as long as possible, but finally, I handed them to the man and turned away so that I could not see what he did. After he finished with them, he threw my chickens over his fence into the yard to thrash out their final moments with dozens of other birds he had already handled. To this day, I cannot understand how we ever recognized our own birds in that maze of feathers and legs.

City people knew nothing about the rural life we took for granted. A city bred medical student once told me that chicken eggs became fertile when men injected them with rooster sperm. I told him that I had seen roosters jumping the hens to mate, and the resulting eggs were fertile. Our geese and ducks mated only in the water, a practice that worried me because I thought our geese might drown in the process. They never did.

Summertime also meant trips to various spas for the well-to-do

families in our area. Karlove Vary (Karlsbad), and Marien Bad, west of our region, were more popular than any local spas. Not only were the trip and the stay expensive, but the fine clothes and luggage people took with them created an image of great wealth. 'Balebatesh', (very successful), was how they looked as they left town with their children and all their suitcases.

Tisha b'av, a holy day on which we commemorated the destruction of the Second Temple in Israel, was a fast day for us. I remember sitting at the river's edge on the long hot day, not daring to soak one toe in the cool running water. At thirteen, girls and boys were obligated to fast, and my stomach growled for food while the Gentile kids splashed in the water. How I wished I could have joined them, but outwardly I never revealed my misery. Those were the times when I talked to G-d, asking Him if our suffering was so that we would be worthy of Him or was it to teach us to appreciate life and not take it for granted? I found it hard to correlate our suffering with our ancestors' experiences. Only later did I begin to understand that we would have no future if we discarded our past.

All summer, while produce was plentiful, we canned and preserved food for the long cold winter to come. There was no such thing as going to the store to buy jams or jellies. We would eat what we had prepared, so my parents and our neighbors worked hard to gather enough potatoes, beans, cabbage, garlic, and corn for storage. It was hard work, but I doubt that any of us were consciously aware of the hardships we endured because, in

general, everyone else lived the same way. Of course, there were exceptions like the merchants or professional people who had live-in help.

September first meant back to school and the inevitable first assignment: How did we spend the summer? While we children readjusted to school life, my parents, Mamika especially, began preparations for the Jewish New Year, Rosh Hashanah. She needed two new dresses for the two days she would spend in the Temple. She brought the material she purchased in the city to a fine seamstress to make into one-of-a-kind outfits. Then she took her wig to a professional hair salon for styling. Mamika's own hair was shaved off, leaving just a few blonde strands that peeked out from under the front of the beret she wore summer and winter. Tatika always designed a new pair of shoes for Mamika for the holidays. They varied in color from year to year, sometimes, black or grey, sometimes brown or navy.

When school began, Tatika made shoes for us children. I will never forget the year he promised me a new pair of shoes for the Holy Days. They were almost ready, lacking only the heels which only Tatika could finish. The day before the holiday arrived, and the shoes still sat unfinished. Father was rushing to complete his customers' orders, and my shoes sat on the bench, waiting. I passed by many times during the day, and every time, his apprentices shook their heads as if to say,'Not yet'. I am sure Tatika noticed me, but he paid me no attention. I grew anxious. I wanted those shoes so badly. I was ready to give up. As the clock began to strike the

last hour of the workday, suddenly one of the apprentices came in to tell me that Tatika just started on my shoes. "Will he have time to finish them?, I asked. "It's almost time to light the candles". "Don't worry," he answered, "You will have your shoes for Yom Tov." (Holy Day) How he finished in so little time, I will never know. He had golden hands, my Tatika. The shoes were navy kidskin and fit me like a glove, thanks to his careful measurements. We were not rich in material ways, but seeing things made or grown in front of our eyes gave me a sense of wealth and security more valuable than money.

At sundown, at the moment designated by our Rebbe, Rosh Hashanah began. The community observance lasted two days, with each religious custom practiced to the letter of the law. Meals prepared ahead of time, filled the kitchen with delicious aromas of roasted chicken, soup, stuffed cabbage, apple strudel, poppy seed cake, and cinnamon croissants filled with raisins and nuts. Fresh mineral water was delivered for the occasion. We left our sparkling clean house early in the morning to worship with family and friends in the Temple until two in the afternoon. Together, the entire congregation prayed for G-d's loving kindness to cleanse us of our sins and transgressions, and give us spiritual strength. After services, husbands and sons met their wives and daughters outside of the Temple or Shul for the happy walk home. (Men sat on the first floor, and the women sat upstairs for the religious services.) Older children, holding the

hands of younger siblings, met their parents and together, families walked home after Temple, each dressed in their very best clothes. The most pious (chasidim) wore shiny black robes with white stockings and wide fur hats over their dancing side locks as they walked home from the Shul. It was a beautiful sight, our whole town of happy families on a joyous holiday.

As soon as we were all home, father washed his hands and made a blessing over the wine and bread. Mamika served a holiday meal. We began with a dish of chopped eggs, onions, and chicken fat seasoned with salt and freshly ground pepper, that we ate with white braided bread (challah). Chicken soup with home made noodles, roast chicken, potatoes, pickled gherkins and horseradish were followed by apple strudel and mineral water. On Rosh Hashanah, my parents and our neighbors, skipped their afternoon siesta because they believed they should be wide awake all day, to make sure Hashem (G-d) would not forget to judge them well for the new year. Our belief that G-d judged each person, Kol Yisroel, (all the Jewish people), on this day, and determined each one's fate for the coming year, was taken very seriously. Late in the afternoon, the whole family gathered the crumbs from the dining table and headed to the river with the neighbors. There, we all threw the crumbs into the water, symbolically casting away our sins. (At the same time, the quick river fish had a holy day as well.)

Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, our most important holy day, began

with candle lighting at sundown in memory of the departed as well as for the living. Grownups wore dark clothing, except for Tatika. He wore the white kittle (robe) in which he was to be buried,'after one hundred and twenty years' (the length of Moses' life). Our people wore slippers, no shoes, to Temple, for the full twenty four hour holiday. In the Temple, the Gabbi (custodian) lit a candle for each family. As the hours passed, the air grew heavy.

Every member of the congregation from age thirteen up, fasted from sundown to sundown. My first fast day was miserable. I wished I were younger, and could hardly wait for the day to end. Even pregnant women were not excused. One year, a young woman named Devorah fainted in Temple and was not given one drop of water to drink until the Rebbe approved. And that was all she got. I felt that her health was more important than the holy day. But when I told her I thought the men were too harsh and should consider her condition, she replied that it was G-d's wish and so may it be. A few days later, she delivered a healthy baby boy. She made a lasting impression on me. Later, her entire family perished in Auschwitz, innocent victims of evil men.

People stayed in the Temple all day on our most solemn day, Yom Kippur. Everybody prayed to be inscribed in the Book of Life. This was understood in the spiritual sense. If a man failed to repent his sins, that was the equivalent of being inscribed, G-d forbid, in the Book of

Death. This concept came from the Baal Shem Tov, a holy man who lived from 1700 to 1760. He inspired my people to live a righteous life and, in turn, to be an inspiration to others. I, too, find this philosophy affecting my life. A good deed somehow begets a good experience. When I cannot perform the good deed, I feel guilty. Without this kind of a conscience, man can become a Hitler, and we know what happened to him in the end. Justice did prevail. But, Oh Lord, at what price!

The holiday of Sukkoth followed Yom Kippur by four days. To observe it properly, we built a make shift house, a Sukkah, of four flimsy wooden walls, with an opening for an entrance, and corn stalks for a roof, open to the stars. We decorated the walls with our finest artistic efforts, and ate our meals there for eight days. It always rained during this happy festival of harvest and of freedom, but that never stopped Tatika from making the blessings over the wine and challa. Sometimes, weather forced us to eat in the house, but we loved sitting around the holiday table under the starry sky. After Father made the blessing over the bread, we each dunked a piece of bread into honey to symbolize a sweet year to come

On the eighth day came our celebration of the Scriptures, Simhat Torah. So many symbols mark this special day. With an esrog (lemon-like fruit) and a lulav (palm frond) held in our hands, we gave thanks for the privilege of living to see the harvest season and for building the sukkah to commemorate our ancestors' plight in the wilderness. The Temple rang

with song as congregants danced around the room carrying Torahs in their arms. Very pious people slept in the Sukkah, disregarding the chill fall weather. These 'frume menchen' (religious people) studied, taught and translated the Five Books of Moses. If and when a problem arose in family or community, they found the solutions in these books. One Jew speaking to another said you can't find a better interpretation anywhere in the world.

Our Chanukah observance began with the lighting of a special candle, an oil-filled potato with a wick in it. Our whole family stood together by the kitchen window each night for eight days as we lit this candle and recited blessings commemorating the destruction of the Second Temple of Israel and the miracle of the oil lamp that burned for eight days with only a single day's supply of oil. Then we feasted on potato pancakes and Mamika's home-made doughnuts.

These holidays came once a year, but every week, we celebrated the greatest of our holy days, the Sabbath. Not to be compared with Yom Kippur, Shabbat was a day for prayer, meditation, giving charity, good food and rest, a day to be at peace with man and G-d. A Sabbath observing Jew who lived this way, who gave tzedekah (charity), and lived a righteous life was known as a 'balebatesher mensch', one who gained the respect of his fellow men.

My father's income grew during my teen years and my parents talked of their plans for us, plans that would reap them great 'nachas' (pleasure

from the children). Mother planned to give me the plot of land next to our house to build my own home when I would marry. She wanted me, the eldest daughter, nearby. Dudie was destined to be a doctor, she said. Benci, she decided, needed more time to grow up. And the three little girls were all so pretty that no one worried for their future. But changes were in the wind, changes like fewer admissions to schools of higher learning because the government had priorities that came before education, priorities affected by war drums sounding all around us. Ours was a true democracy, a peaceful land with full rights for all citizens, until the 1930's.

THE WAR YEARS

Adolph Hitler became Chancellor of the German Reich in 1933, and immediately began to issue propaganda that paved the way toward dismantling the restrictive terms of the Versailles Treaty. Within a few years, his propaganda machine demanded independence for the Sudeten Germans, those German speaking people who lived in the Sudetes Mountain region of Czechoslovakia. Czechoslovakia recognized this as a threat to its independence and reacted by signing defensive alliances with France and England.

In our beautiful Carpathian Mountain region where the air was as fresh as mountain dew, the water sparkling clean, where mineral springs overflowed, where every natural resource was found in abundance, people

lived in harmony with nature, creating those things necessary to their own existence. These proud people had lived in the same area for generations, working hard to raise their families. It was a safe place to live and work, until talk of war made people fearful and apprehensive. Young people grew anxious and depressed, knowing full well that they would be called upon to fight if war broke out. People started to hoard foodstuffs and lines formed at every turn. Czech Jews mistrusted the strange alliances their country had entered into, and many looked to Russia for safety. Some Jews left their homes for what they thought would be a safe haven behind the Iron Curtain.

When the ill winds started to blow in Europa, non-Jews were easily convinced that all the faults plaguing Europa were the fault of the Jews. Before Czechoslovakia had organized in 1918, past rulers had not been so compassionate towards their Jewish citizenry. In our area of Carpathia, the Czech government did not differentiate between racial or religious groups, yet Jews tended to feel as a people apart from the mainstream of life. Even when life was pretty good, with equal rights and rules, we lived in fear of the future, of what might happen.

The peasants did not resist the propaganda against the Jewish people despite years of living as neighbors. Suddenly, our worst fears were about to be confirmed as we became strangers in our birthplace. The Jews once again became the scapegoat as the Christian world condemned their G-d's

brethern. What an irony of life!

Life came to a standstill in September, 1938, when the leaders of France, Germany, Great Britain and Italy met at Munich to discuss Hitler's demands in Chechoslovakia. Neville Chamberlain of Great Britain and Edward Daladier of France agreed to Hitler's demands for parts of Czechoslovakia. The Czechs had to turn over the entire Sudeten to Germany within twenty days. Poland took 400 square miles of land to the north, near Ostrowa. Hungary's share was a large slice from southern Slovakia. On March fifteenth, 1939, German troops violated the Munich agreement and marched into Prague. Then Hitler gave the eastern part of Czechoslovakia, our region, the Carpatho-Ukraine, to Hungary, and our troubles began. Naini Ida and her family moved from Mukachevo to Svaljava when the new government clamped restrictions on freedoms. Her husband, an idealistic communist, refused to live under a fascist regime.

The Czech Army was called to protect the Sudeten from Germany, and within forty eight hours, laid down their arms in surrender. What a sad day for our land. Our idealistic people could not believe what had happened to them. They were willing to die for their country, they said, but they were so pitifully outnumbered that there was no use.

Rumors flew that Jewish men were going to be used by Hungary as slave labor, so those who could, including my Uncle Shloime and his friends, escaped through the underground.

Czechs who had moved to the Carpatho-Ukraine began moving back to Czechoslovakia which had been reduced in size to an area smaller than New York state. The Horthy government, in its new alliance with Germany, became totally anti-Semitic. Jews, who had lived freely as full citizens since the country was established in 1918, and who were among the state's most respected leaders in every sphere of life, were reduced to 'persona non grata', unwanted people to do with as the new leaders wished.

I went to the State House in Svaljava for a document and waited in line for hours while Christians and gypsies who came in after me were seen. A gypsie noticed my dilemma and asked why this Jewish girl was still waiting. "Isn't she a person like us?" The treatment was new to me but very familiar to the gypsie, whose people were used to being treated as second class citizens. For the first time in my life, I understood that I, too, was a nobody, just like the gypsies. And I realized how unjustly we had treated them. The horrible, humbling experience proved to be a turning point in my life. I never again looked down upon another human being.

Nothing could happen without credentials. Dudie's days at the gymnasium in Mucachevo were numbered as he soon became eligible for the draft. Mamika worried about him. Tatika tried everything possible to get him out of the country to America. When the papers finally arrived for Dudie to attend college in America, Mamika could not let him go. She carried on so that he stayed, finished school, and began working in a

factory office, thanks to Uncle Shloime's influence. Dudie felt lucky, going off to work each day, the young white collar executive in his jacket and tie. The army soon drafted him and Mamika was devastated. The day he left, we all walked with him to the main street. She talked and talked, reminding him, " use your head... keep out of trouble..do you have everything you need in your rucksack?" Finally, she turned back, unable to actually see him leave and said, "Lomer gain kinderlach" (Let's go, children.) Parting from him was doubly sad because rumors advised us that all Jewish families would be taken from their homes and sent somewhere else to work, and we didn't know where we would be when Dudie returned.

Our first news of him was bad. He was hospitalized due to an emergency appendectomy, which was performed by a German surgeon. Luckily, he pulled through and was sent home on a one month sick leave, a sallow skinned ghost of himself. Mamika nursed him back to health, with the best foods she could find,and with a special tonic from the doctor. He walked with a cane, and gradually recuperated. This time, her advice was even stronger, to eat everything put in front of him to keep up his strength. "Gib ubacht", (be on guard), she said as he left. "Gib ubacht", were the last words he ever heard her say.

We ran after the postman every day, looking for letters from Dudie. His frequent letters were well marked by the censor but that didn't matter, for Tatika found a way to get the news. He faithfully listened to the

radio and read the Hungarian language Slovakia 'Gazette', analyzing the news in terms of its impact on the entire country, including the Jewish minority. The Hungarian government which now controlled our area, went to every house where a short wave radio was known to be. They set the tuner to the Hungarian government-run station. Then they sealed it shut by pouring hot sealing wax onto the control and attaching a metal seal. But Tatika outsmarted them. He inserted a tiny screw driver from underneath the set, and freed the tuner from the wax so that he could continue to listen to the British Broadcasting Station, the BBC. I stood guard outside the house and the instant I spotted a policeman, I shouted a warning to shut off the radio.

The news was incredible. We could not comprehend what we heard. Events piled in on us with such fury that we nearly became paralyzed with the horror of it. Every day, the government imposed new restrictions on us Jews. The Church taught our Gentile neighbors that not only was the Jew the Christ killer, but he was also responsible for all the ills they were now suffering. All avenues of escape were closed. We were left with no place to go, no place to hide. We were doomed.

Some escaped. Some secular Jews outwitted the Nazi planners by suicide pacts with their families. The religious pious Jews did not want to hear what was ahead for them. Such evil could not exist in their world. It was unimaginable to their way of life or of thinking. I cling to the

belief that if there had been a way out, someone would have rescued every Jew - alive. But for us, in 1939, there was no escape. By the time we understood what our planners had in mind for us, there was absolutely nowhere to go. Every last ship to freedom, every train across the border was gone. Only despair remained. Yet never in our wildest dreams did we imagine what was to come.

The Germans marched into our area the day before Passover. A German officer knocked on our door and very politely asked if we had a guest room available for him. Father said yes and led him to the room. The officer introduced himself as "Oberfuhrer" of his regiment. After a few minutes of polite conversation with my parents, there he was, seated at our Seder table. He ate our food, drank our wine, and seemed to be very impressed with the proceedings. He stayed to the end and thanked my parents for the privilege of being our guest at such a festive event. What happened after Passover made me think that his plans called for our deportation that very day, but instead, he let all the Jews finish the eight days of Passover at home. The morning after Pesach, a German soldier stationed at every Jewish home gave each family one hour to clear out and line up in front of their house.

Thanks to my Tatika's standing in the community, he had been tipped off the day before by a state house officer, who warned him of the impending deportation. Everyone worked feverishly all night to get ready.

We needed good shoes or boots, and that was taken care of. Everyone of us had krone or gold sewn into our jackets in case a need should arise, where life or death might depend on it. Food, warm clothing-- how do you pack a family of seven people? At exactly five in the morning, we stood outside in the chill March dawn, scared to death. With us were our most precious possessions, things like the photograph of the family taken outside one lovely summer day.

Our new-born kittens remained in the house. The Germans locked them in and put a seal on the door, saying, it is all going to be there for us when the war ends. The children mentioned the kittens and the Germans shouted, "Mach schnel" (Make fast). Without food, without care, the kittens would die. We heard those words as we stood there, looking at ourselves, with packs on our backs, and we knew it was no good. Within moments, we had become the proverbial wandering Jew and we were frightened. Pitifully, my little sisters looked to us, the older siblings, and to our parents, for some kind of sign that everything was all right. Instead of comfort or courage, they read fear and hopelessness in our eyes. Without a sound, they, too, resigned themselves to whatever would come.

Our neighbors lined up in front of their homes for the head count by the German soldiers. Not until every person was accounted for, and they knew exactly how many should be at each address, were we ready to leave. We walked as we were directed, into town. Along the way, I saw each

family, led by the father, as if to slaughter. We were marched to the Temple where we were kept overnight, sleeping on the small amount of bedding we had been permitted to carry with us. We ate whatever food we had packed, food that was to be our last decent meal. Our captivity had begun.

Next day, we were ordered to take half of our belongings, no more, with us. People left clothing, boxes, satchels and bundles piled high on the Temple floor. Again we were marched, this time to the train station where we were thrown into waiting cattle cars like a heap of animals. We were crushed together with no space to turn. As the doors slammed shut, I saw how shocked and desolate my helpless people were. Fortunately, it was only a short time before the doors opened and we recognized the clay factory of Mukacevo, thirty kilometers from home. There we met all the Jews from the surrounding areas. We were herded into the brick factory which had no doors and no window frames. Fresh clay bricks were stacked to dry in these open sheds. Food was scarce. There was no privacy. But life went on.

I became a barber. I 'organized' a pair of scissors and became the best haircutter there. The little children sat on a chair, telling me their worries, while I trimmed their hair. "Just please don't tell my mother what I am telling you. I don't want my parents to worry about me," they said. I loved those kids and I think we helped each other. In that awful G-d

forsaken place, somebody cared enough to cut and comb their hair and listen to them. And their confidence and trust in me gave me encouragement to face each day. We were so far removed from the mainstream of the life we had known that the outside world ceased to exist for us. That eerie feeling still comes over me no matter where I may be, and with it comes that cold chill March air blowing through the brick shed.

We spent one month like that. During that period, my father had a chance to go home. The Germans wanted some fine leather, so they granted him the rare opportunity to return to Svaljava. He brought back the leathers, a cook pot, and as much potatoes, onions, paprika, cooking fat, and parquet kindling as he could carry. On the kindling fire near the side of the shed, Mamika made 'paprikash crumply' (potatoes with paprika), the last meal she was ever to cook for us. Tatika was so proud to be able, once again, to provide for his family. But others were not so happy about it. Envy and suspicion were easily aroused and everyone wanted to know how come he was allowed to go home. My parents shared what they had brought until it all went.

The Germans announced that transports were being formed to ship us all to Germany. We left with the last transport. We were ordered to leave all valuables behind. Anyone caught with anything of value will be shot dead on the spot. As soon as the announcement was made, people started throwing away their jewelry, their rings and watches. People who could not hide

things in their clothes, stashed them away between the piles of bricks in the shed. They played right into the hands of the Germans. Our executioners knew of our destiny and wanted our valuables then and there for themselves. We, personally, did not discard anything because we had sewn everything important into our layers of clothing. To this day, I can see our poor wretched people shedding their precious diamonds and gold, littering the streets as they walked, and getting nothing, not even a slice of bread, in return.

It was all in vain. What a rotten world we lived in. The people were rotten. Evil prevailed and innocent children were dragged down despite their helplessness. I felt that I was dying for them. So great was the pain. This is why the story must be told -- for future generations to be on guard against pig-like human beings who drag the world's people down with them. Never, never again must this happen!

We were loaded into green military trucks and taken to the trains again. We passed by people who saw us and didn't even react. They didn't care. They acted as if it were an everyday occurrence. We were all very quiet, scared out of our wits. If not, we would not have been able to bear it. Had I not been so scared, I would have gone out of my mind. I was so fearful for my Mamika and for my little sisters that I forgot all about myself.

Once we arrived at the train station, we were shoved into more cattle cars that were lined up away from the main station. Children and parents were violently separated. Bedlam broke out, each screaming the other's name, helpless to find one another in the tumult. The German guards nearly killed anyone who resisted being thrust through those gaping doors. But mothers and fathers fought to hold onto their children, not caring what punishment might come their way. Sheer animal survival instinct took over, and after awhile, the Germans seemed to ease off in order to accomplish their loading assignment.

Mamika spotted little Saralle, bewildered by the uproar, standing all by herself away from our line. Mamika stepped out of line and grabbed her little body to bring her with us. A big SS man hit Mamika over the head with a black rubber hose. Blood trickled down her forehead. She did not react to the onslaught. I never hated anyone as I hated that animal in SS clothing, that German beast. I knew then that if I lived through these horrible times, I would tell the world about it.

They locked us in without food or water, with one pail for human waste. We were a mass of humanity, packed so tightly together that there was no room to turn. How long we were in there is impossible to tell. No light or dark marked the days. There was no rest, no sleep. I fell into a stupor, unable to react or respond. The stench was intolerable. People began to die. My own misery so consumed me that death no longer

overwhelmed me. I looked at it as an escape. I was so weak, there was little left to me. I felt like a corpse myself.

When the day finally came that the doors opened, light blinded me. Fresh air brought me back to reality and to my horror, I discovered that the journey was not over. The SS was looking for more jewelry. A tall young blond SS officer with a bayonet slung over his shoulder ripped my turquoise earrings out of my pierced ears. Who cared about torn earlobes as long as I got some fresh air in the process. Mamika looked at me and then at my sisters and said, "I have already lived. But what do they want from my children?" I will never forget those words to me. Never again did I hear her speak.

The fresh air we breathed was Polish air, in the city of Katowice. Within a day, we arrived at the infamous concentration camp of Auschwitz. The train doors opened, letting in the blinding early morning light. As my eyes slowly focused, I saw the dead among us, waxen distorted figures crowding the floor of the car. My family made it through, thanks to the tough conditioning our life on the land had provided. Two men, wearing blue and white pajama-like garments, entered the car. "Yinge menschen," they spoke to us in Yiddish, "geits zu der linke seid." (Young people go to the left side) What did they mean? "Don't take anything with you from the car."

I was half dead, slumped over, nearly lying on the floor. I heard the

orders and tried to stand but my rubbery legs would not respond. "Mach schnell." (Make it fast), one man yelled. I understood and somehow landed on my feet on the rocky loading area. I struggled for a footing until at last I was able to walk. My nose told me we were in Poland. Back home, people used to say that every country had its own smell, but this was horrendous. It smelled worse than burning goose feathers, more like smouldering acidy rubber. In the distance, forbidding smoke stacks spewed forth thick black smoke that fell heavily to the ground. Why, I wondered, didn't the smoke go up?

Huge vicious dogs looked me in the eye. Could it get worse than this? In the same instant, I noticed the tall SS officer holding a long whip in one hand and a beautiful woman, crowned with a head full of silken blonde braids, and a second whip in her hand. They must be for the dogs, I thought to myself. I couldn't have been more wrong. The whips and the dogs were for us, persuaders to hurry us through the selection.

Men were immediately separated from women, and ordered to stand in a group next to us, until suddenly, they disappeared. Women whose pregnancies were obvious were sent away. Gangs of SS men commandeered this process, men with huge German Shepard dogs by their sides. But it was the couple I first spotted near the dogs who ran this show. Those two talked and laughed, having such fun, while they lined us up, five to a line. She handled the whip as well as the man, so no one dallied. Our little family

was now five women, so we made our own group after we crossed the railroad tracks to stand as we were ordered. I stood at the left of the line. Sarallø stood next to me, then Rifka, Evika and Mamika, squeezing each other's clammy hands. When our turn came for the selection, this tall handsome well-dressed man with the whip in his hand motioned for me to cross the tracks and pushed me to the left of the tracks to wait for the next order. Meanwhile, we had heard men around us say that those selected to the right will be transferred by trucks to the distant family lager. It sounded reasonable to me, until I turned around to find that Mamika, Evika, Sarallø, and Rifkala were lost in a sea of people. As I consoled myself with the thought that they were better off travelling by truck, who should I see but Rifkala standing next to me. "Why are you here?" I asked her. "Mamika sent me to you so that you should not be alone." She was right. It felt better having her with me at that moment.

The morning sun felt good on my face, and it felt good to be walking after that terrible journey. We went to the gate where we read, "Arbeit Macht Frei" (work makes free). I was relieved that we were going to work. But I was also concerned about Rifkala. How would such a tiny childlike girl survive here?

We arrived at our destination in Birkenau, still part of Auschwitz, where my mind would not accept what my horrified eyes saw. An entire factory full of people were stripped naked. Our hair was shaved off our

heads. Men stood watching as our pubic hair was shaved off our bodies. My sister's beautiful long light brown braids were thrown to the floor. It was a blow that struck clear into my soul. I started to fear for my sanity. The shame, the assault on our beings was incomprehensible. We were undergoing the most terrible, dehumanizing treatment. Systematically, methodically, each human spirit was attacked and destroyed. People turned gray in front of my eyes. We had lived the most sheltered of lives, never ever exposing our bodies in any way, to anyone. In the closest of family quarters, modesty was upheld as the highest of virtues. And now, here we were, stripped of our clothing, our hair, our psyches. It was more than I could bear. There was my sister, my Rifka, looking at me so bewildered. Every bone, every nerve in my body shook. Her huge brown eyes tore me to shreds.

Then came the showers. When we emerged, dripping wet from them, a clothing handler told me how lucky I was to be alive. I asked a woman, one of the ones wearing a striped apron and a white kerchief on her head, what the handler meant. "You are lucky," she answered me. "They just finished gassing the gypsies so there is space for you in C lager." That was the second time we were lucky. The first time was getting the last transport out of Mukachevo. That delay gave us this chance.

It did not take long to understand our good fortune, because we quickly realized that this place was geared for death. Any move could be

fatal. My sister and I looked at each other, standing naked, cold and wet, clutching our shoes in our hands. I still had my navy blue boots with the cuban heels that Tatika made for me. The order came to line up for clothes. We saw piles of slips, dresses, ropes, and round dishes with handles. Dishes, I thought, must mean they will feed us soon. I was standing in the clothing line and had just received a slip which I promptly put over me, when, all of a sudden, a Jewish girl who was working there grabbed my boots out of my hands. Without hesitating, I ran over to the German SS woman, the same one from the train station. I told her what had happened; that the boots were my only possession from my father and that the girl had grabbed them from me. The woman caught hold of the girl, yanked the boots away from her, and thrust them at me, slapping my face so hard that I went flying across the room and cracked my head against the cinder block wall. I had my boots. I had a sore head. I had no dress. And I didn't dare go back to get one. I was too afraid. I wound up outside in my slip with a rope around my waist and the dish hanging from it.

It was not my slip. My clothes were supposedly taken to be disinfected. What I got was just the opposite, full of blood-sucking body lice that quickly ate themselves into my skin. Outside, we were lined up again by fives. Heads were counted and we were marched into Auschwitz Lager C.

We passed through many gates before we reached C Lager. In Birkenau, at the Entlausung (Free of Lice), I met some people who had been there for a couple of weeks. I asked them where the Family Camp was. They answered, "Freig nish (don't ask). You are better off for it." Others told me the awful truth, pointing to the foul smoke billowing from those sooty black chimneys. "That is the family camp." One woman told me, " the Gestapo is in charge there, forcing our people to do their dirty work. When the work is finished, they do away with the workers they no longer want. People here are disappearing all the time. Try not to go to work on the camp, I am warning you. Keep away from selections altogether."

What news to hear on our first day in Auschwitz! We were fed with stories of agony and evil, stories so horrendous that I forgot my hunger. My mind and my stomach churned as I began to comprehend the terrible situation I was in. I could not think clearly -- so much to digest. Where was G-d in this scheme of things? Can't He see what is going on? Why isn't He striking these murderers dead? I wanted justice. Shouldn't evil be punished? I had been taught that a human being who committed a wrong against another human being would be punished. My horror turned to anger and frustration, making me irritable and sick to my stomach.

We walked further through Birkenau, along wire fenced yards that enclosed gangs of men prisoners who kept shouting to us, "Rieren ze nish die druten sei hoben electric in sei " (Don't touch the wire fences.

They are electrified.) Another dreadful piece of information assaulted my overloaded mind, sending me back into a mindless stupor. All I wanted to do was to lay my head down in sleep and not wake up again. Ah, now I had a choice. I could touch the electrified fence and call it quits. But through the foggy tunnels of my mind came Tatika's voice before we left home, saying that we will meet together at home when this is all over. And there was Rifka. I had a responsibility to her. What will happen to her? Oh, G-d, help me. What will happen to us? How much worse can it get? I was crying inside myself, totally out of control. Yet I could not let Rifkala know my despair. I had to be strong for both of us. Look what we were up against. We came out of that building, stripped, shaved, turned into convicts, the hopelessness on our faces beyond description. Our eyes spoke the words our mouths dared not form.

Still walking through that enormous death camp, we were bombarded with questions screamed at us from people behind walls or wired fences. Names of loved ones were thrust at us, and we, in turn, asked about our own missing family. Where is the family camp? Where are our mothers, our children? Everybody hollered at the same time. No one got answers. Meanwhile, the pace intensified. We gained a Blockova, a woman who had charge of us. This one had a full head of hair, looked pretty well fed, and was as tough as nails. "Stop all your shouting or I'll do such and such to you," was her welcome message.

Camp C. Blockova opened the gate. We could hardly wait to go in and lie down. Instead, she blew her whistle, shouting, "Celapel." (counting of heads). We stood there, forever it seemed, next to Block No.18 (barracks), I in a slip, the others in dresses, until the numbers agreed for the whole camp. Then the Blockova picked four girls to go to the kitchen to get our evening meal. Still we stood, half dead, until the girls came back and a portion was doled out to us, the first food we had in more than a week. It was soup, they said. Sandy dishwater was what it tasted like, peculiar tasting even for sand. What we did not know at the time was that they added a hormone to retard our menstrual cycles. From the time we arrived there, no woman had her period. With the soup, we got a fourth of a small wheat bread with a piece of margarine or jam, never both. Rifkala and I decided to eat one portion between us, in case there was nothing the next day. We did not trust those bastards. We finished eating and licked our bowls clean with our tongues, since there was no other way to wash the dish.

I thought I had seen everything, but the sight of that barracks shocked me. Tiers of bunks lined the long barracks' walls, bunks with no bedding, just a wooden board to lay your body on. A low lying partition between the aisles enclosed what we later discovered was a back room with a big tub -- the outhouse. Total fatigue protected me that first night in Auschwitz from thinking about my surroundings. When reality set in, so did depression. One of my biggest problems was fighting off feelings of

despair. I could not afford the luxury. I had my younger sister Rifka to look out for. We grabbed the nearest bunks which happened to be the top left ones nearest the door. I figured that if the bunks fell in, at least we would be on top, and not be crushed by others falling on us. We piled onto the bunks, and slept, warmed by the bodies around us. In the chilly spring air, we had no other source of heat.

A shrill whistle jolted me out of a nightmare. The Blockova whistled and shouted and cracked her whip at anybody near her. "Rous, rous, eins, zvei, drei." (Out, out one two three). This Polish Jewess who had been in the camp for more than two years had to have been quite an organizer to reach such heights as Blockova over Czech Jewish women prisoners. She picked an equally tough girl, the younger sister of a classmate of mine from my home town, Svaljava, as her assistant. With the older sister on our bunk, we sometimes got a little more soup or could skip the back room cleanup job. That labelled us the elite in the eyes of the others. Every little bit helped to survive the day's misery.

Blockova's room was on the right side of the block entrance and contained a bench to hold our daily rations of bread and a bed. Bread delivered to our block was stored in her room until it was sliced by her assistants, people who had reached the highest position possible under her command. One day, I was picked to stand guard outside the barracks barn-like door while Mengele, nicknamed the "Angel of Death" by the concentration camp inmates, rendezvoused in Blockova's room with the blonde, Irma Krause, who had met our train and who later had returned my boots to me. That day, my portion of bread seemed to be a little bigger, a great achievement on my part.

The sharp whistle that woke me on my first Auschwitz morning signaled the start of the daily ritual lineup by fives outside in the cold before sunup. I stood shivering in front of our barracks in my thin slip, while Rifkala, wearing only a dress, stood as close as possible to shield me from the chill.

Suddenly I was wracked with chills and fever. My head burned. My tonsils throbbed with pain, and I could barely swallow. Minutes turned into hours as we stood celapel, waiting for the messenger to come, take our count from Blockova, add it to the rest of the camp, and permit us to continue the daily routine. We were not allowed to reenter the barracks until Blockova gave the word. When that finally happened, I realized that my temperature had disappeared as suddenly as it had come.

For breakfast, we drank pale watery coffee, and for lunch, it was the

clear gritty soup again. Bread with either margarine or jam was our evening meal. That was it -- day in and day out, the menu of Auschwitz.

While standing celapel between the barracks ~~on our second~~ NEXT morning, I saw the unbelievable. In a long line of men walking by our barracks, passed Tatika and Benci. Such a coincidence had to be a one in a million happening. Without caring about Blockova and her orders, I ran out of line yelling at the top of my lungs, "Tatika, Tatika, Bencike, this is Lajcsu." My Father, astonished, looked at me and asked, "Lajcsu? Lajcsu? Where is your dress?" By this time, Rifkala had caught up with me. I showed him my feet. "Look," I said, " I have my boots. They keep me warm." For the first time, Tatika saw his elder daughters looking like two shorn, half naked apparitions. With sadness and disbelief on his face, he asked for Mamika and the little ones. I told him that they went by truck --it was too far to walk to the Family Lager. I asked him if he had anything to eat. He and Benci said they not only had no food, they had no place to stay. That was when I gave them the piece of bread that Rifka and I had decided not to eat until our next portion. I had to beg them to take it.

Poor Tatika. Poor Bencike. Dressed in those striped pajamas, with their heads shaven, they looked so forlorn. Father introduced me to the man walking with him, saying, "Dis is meine eltere tochter Leah." (This is my oldest daughter, Leah.) In the split second before we parted, he said, "Lomer sich trefen in der heim nuch dercrieg." (Let us meet at home after

the war.) When I returned to my place in line, Blockova made believe she neither saw nor heard what had transpired beside our barracks. I watched Tatika and Benci walk away until the side of our building blocked them from view. In the eight months we stayed in C Lager, theirs was the only transport of men that ever passed by.

Serious problems began for me when my thin little sister refused to eat the soup. That meant that I got a double portion so I told her to eat the bread instead. She would not hear of it. As far as she was concerned, soup counted for nothing. We were all rapidly losing weight, but Rifka's cheeks sucked in faster and her soft dark eyes sank deeper into her bony face than anyone else's. At fourteen, Rifka was probably six years younger than most of us, noticeably underdeveloped and less mature. Within days, her short sleeved dress barely hid her bony yellowed arms, and even though it brushed her ankles, it couldn't conceal her skeletal appearance. That spelled trouble for both of us.

There was no peace for anyone in Auschwitz. Constant orders to go to some unknown destination meant lineups at the gate. Those picked to go were not told where or why. You might be selected for entlausung or for gassing. No one knew in advance what might be in store for them. Barracks by barracks were chosen at random, perhaps for showers and fresh clothing, perhaps not. I figured out that the worst looking barracks were usually chosen, and tried to avoid being among them. I also knew I could

not go for entlausung without having at least a dress on my back. When my filthy slip began to fall apart, I decided that the next time our barracks was scheduled to go to Birkenau, I would have to take my chances. So, Rifkala came with me for the next lineup.

Eichmann stood there by the gate, his black piercing eyes scaring the hell out of us. We went through to the showers, and this time I was a nervous wreck when the jets started. Thank the Lord, water came out again. Rifka and I both received a slip and a dress. We had our dishes with us, and luckily we got back alright. But our luck didn't hold.

Rifka became so ill she could barely stand for celapel. With a little protectzia (help from a knowledgeable friend), I got her into the infirmary where she didn't have to stand celapel. A few days later, my friend came running to warn me to get Rifka out of there because Dr.Mengele would be coming the next day to make a selection for the crematoria. Oh, my G-d, what was I going to do? My friend said I had no choice but to get her out of there or she was as good as dead. She finished by saying, "If you feel she would be better off dead, then leave her there." How dare she think that I would make a life or death decision for my own sister! We managed to get Rifka back to the barracks. We stood her up, and friends helped me hold her upright during the long hours of celapel. We convinced her to eat the miserable soup. She did get used to eating the slop, but she continued to fade in front of my eyes.

Dr.Mengele began daily selections. I outwitted him by lining up each day with blocks he had selected from the day before. After awhile I lost all my friends because I moved around so much, from place to place, taking Rifka with me. Our clothes were dirty. We were not washed for months, for fear of being selected. By this time, other women grew hostile towards us, and chased us out of each new block we entered because we were so filthy. Not belonging anywhere was very frightening, but the idea of dying was even more so. Rifka was on my mind all the time. I never knew what the next moment would bring, but I knew that I had a responsibility to her, so I did the best I could. Many times, I wished that Mamika had not sent her over to me. I felt that my mother had made a terrible mistake. Rifka at fourteen, five years younger than I, was an immature teenager who absolutely did not belong there. In my heart I felt she would have been better off had she died the day we arrived in Auschwitz.

For eight months, I ran from block to block, escaping Mengele's selections. My mind was totally absorbed in outwitting him, afraid that at any moment he would catch us. More and more young women disappeared each day, until one fateful day when he decided to lock us all up in the block to the left of the street. Those of us who he let run across the street to the opposite block would live.

Trucks lined the streets at C Lager. SS soldiers with bayonets stood

by. Mengele, his assistant, Irma Krause at his side, started the selection from the people who moved past like a conveyor belt. All of us in the blocks were ordered to strip. We were permitted only to wear our shoes. Rifkala was petrified by her knowledge of certain death, so we decided on a strategy. She would go first, and where she went, I would follow. "No," she said, "you go first and I will follow." Nothing would change her mind. She knew she was a burden to me and wanted to give me a chance. But I didn't expect her to take control of her destiny. When the doors of the block opened, people started running forward. With a motion of his hand, Mengele selected. A wave to the side meant chop her down, and the SS men standing by with their bayonets, did just that. They struck down each naked young woman Mengele selected, and threw her into their high-sided truck.

Our turn came. I ran, expecting Rifkala to follow. Instead, she tried to escape and ran back towards the block. Irma Krause ran after her and whipped her emaciated body, raising ugly red welts. Horrified, I saw what was happening to her, and yelled to them to leave her alone. "She is my sister," I screamed. At the same time, her terrified cries could have awakened the dead. The SS men grabbed her thrashing body and shoved her into the truck while Mengele thrust me forward into the opposite block. I felt myself flying across the street crying my heart out. Mengele would not even let us die together as siblings. He knew how to

inflict the utmost pain on the survivor.

I will not forget that horrible night as long as I live. Mengele, the beast, had the ovens going full force. The unlucky girls selected that day were locked up in one block that was separated from the one I was in by a block between us. We could hear those poor tortured souls screaming in pain and terror. They knew exactly what was going to happen to them. After so long in Auschwitz, there was nothing they or I did not know. Early in the morning before celapel, headlights shot through the door of our block as the death trucks came to take away yesterday's selected. My sister Rifkala died the worst death imaginable and I have to live with it for the rest of my life.

The world must know how the Nazi machine operated, and that they had a free hand to do as they wished. The world had abandoned us. The Nazis knew it and feared no consequences. I am driven to speak about it, to tell my story so that never again shall one person have such clout over another human being. If there is any decency left in the world, in the name of the martyrs who lost their lives to the Nazi beasts, for their sake and for ours, let this be a lesson for future generations to be on guard against men like Hitler. Our little sisters and brothers, mothers and fathers, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins must not have died in vain. We owe it to them to perpetuate their memory.

Rifkala once asked me, "Lajcsu, do you think the world knows what the Germans are doing to us?" I told her yes.

"But why is it taking so long," she asked. 'WE ARE SO HUNGRY AND COLD.'

I said, "I wish I knew." It's a good thing that we did not know that the world truly did not care, or we might have given up hope. Without hope, none of us would have had a chance. Then no one would have survived to tell the story.

My life in Auschwitz was a living hell. Long hours standing celapel were followed by the awful waiting from one meal to the next. Selection after selection turned us into jumpy frightened human beings. Each miraculous escape from the daily selections left me exhausted, unable to function. We were all at our wits' end. No place to go. No place to hide. When people hallucinated, I knew they were close to death and escape. Lonliness overwhelmed me. I was 'eine a leine', (without a relative). Only the darkness of night relieved the relentless agony.

Many pregnant women whose condition was not yet noticeable, spontaneously aborted due to malnutrition and stress. Still others carried their babies to term, and saw them born, in the infirmary that was run by the inmates. As soon as the new infant was born, these attendants took it outside and hurled the tiny being against the electrified wire fence. They had good reason. When Mengele found a newborn, he sent both the mother and the infant to the crematorium, and who knows how many others would go with them. Seeing a charred little body lying next to the deadly fence

plunged me into deep despair. I was ready to kill myself to end my misery.

World War II drove men to bestial behavior, to the lowest levels of inhumanity towards mankind. The first time we were ordered to strip naked in front of men, my soul was stripped off and laid on public view. From then on, whatever they inflicted on me was merely abuse on their part, abuse that aroused within me a profound desire to live, to survive. Sometimes I worried that by the time I would be able to tell the world what happened, there might be no one left to tell it to because nobody came to our rescue.

Lonliness and hunger never left me. Our meager rations made me want more. I was starving, physically and spiritually. I saw my body shrink, my breasts flatten, my waist slimmed no wider than a spindle. I walked on two sticks, and hated my emaciated arms. Thank G-d I could not see my face. But I knew how I looked. I could see myself in the eyes of others. Their faces were my face, shallow cheeks and huge bulging eyes, and those big young teeth protruding from behind the skin. I was barely able to move my skeleton or my shell. No wonder so many did not make it, those poor souls, young people whose lives were cut short.

Why not me? Why did I live? How was I able to evade their destiny?

In my hunger, lonliness and despair, frightening dreams of my family filled my mind. Always, they were depending on me. In one recurring

dream, from a great distance, I saw my mother's body being placed on a gigantic shovel in front of an open, flaming oven. No matter how fast I ran to save her, I got there too late. Time and again, I gasped to consciousness, screaming, out of breath, with my heart racing like an engine.

One day late in October, a German SS officer appeared in our midst after celapel. This was most unusual because only "Dr Mengele the Beast" and Irma Krause and their guards ever came to visit, plus several other SS beasts who came to cart away poor wretches to the crematorium. I recognized this one as the shifty eyed monster who stood near the Birkenau gates during our delousing. I figured his visit meant more trouble, but who cared. The sooner they finished us off, the better off we would be. They had torn us from our homes, taken our clothing, our dignity, our sanity, everything that mattered. We were left, living shadows, heaps of walking bones.

But no. He brought good news. He gave his name, Adolph Eichmann. He said that the war was going against the Germans. We would soon be freed and we should not forget that Adolph Eichmann told us so. We were so lost we could not comprehend his words. Total silence answered him. After awhile, we began to understand what he had said, but nothing changed. Our lot did not improve. The deaths continued as people dropped like flies around me. I concluded that Eichmann was just trying to save his own skin

by coming to his victims for grace on his behalf. How dare this high and mighty man, this impeccable SS officer covered with medals for putting innocent children to death, come to us for mercy! How mightily he and his cohorts rode through the streets of Europa, spewing venom, killing women and unborn children. Mercy from me? Never! Let him stand up and pay with his life for every soul that he put to death. Never should he rest in peace!

With Rifkala gone, I was left with a porcia of bread that rightfully belonged to her. I cried as I ate it, swallowing guilt with every bite. And slowly but surely I turned into a wild animal because no normal human being could survive this never ending nightmare. Once she was taken away, I made up my mind that I had to make every effort to get out of Auschwits.

Loud hissing sounds warned us of bombing raids on nearby ammunition stockpiles. I realized that Eichmann had reason for his visit to us. The terrible aural vibrations caused by the hissing hurt our ears so badly that we wished for a direct hit to end our misery. It had a physical effect as

well, leaving me with an inner ear problem to this day. The bombing gave me hope. Maybe they will bomb the tracks leading to the crematorium. The war must be ending. We are not forgotten. All around me, young people were dying from dysentery and hunger. Strong young hearts kept their skeletons in motion, until the very end. Every day, more and more bodies were piled by the gates, waiting for the count and the final trip out of Auschwitz. I knew I could not live much longer under the conditions that existed around me. If I stayed there, I would surely die. Shortly after Rifka died, no longer caring what might happen to me, I went to the gate where people stood in line to go somewhere. I joined them. SS guards took us to Birkenau for entlausung. This time they gave me a complete set of clothes and a coat that hung down to my ankles. The coat front bore a white patch and a number. It was October 1944, and they no longer bothered to tatoo numbers on arms. This was faster. Before shipping us out they gave us some soup and a double portion of bread and jam. We embarked early in the morning and rode in style in a clean passenger train with seats, touring windows and SS women guards. The train headed north to Obershleisien in northern Poland where we were handed over to a burly German farmer on the outskirts of Pirshkau, a small farming town. He told us that he knew exactly where we came from and that if we thought we would have it any easier on his farm, then we were mistaken. We were marched to his barn where we slept on the straw-covered floor, next to the stalls

housing his six cows. He did not know it, but we had not had such luxury since our captivity began. Even the food was better. We found rotten potatoes in the foul smelling soup we were given.

SS soldiers replaced our SS women guards the next day. The SS men immediately marched us nearly three kilometers from the farm to a marked area where they ordered us to dig wide tank trenches. They had to be exactly four and a half meters in depth and width in order to trap the British tanks that were expected to invade Germany.

My right index finger was, by now, totally useless. A severe infection attacked the finger while I was in Auschwitz and it began to rot away. During the march and the work outdoors in the sun, new skin appeared, a sure sign to me and to my friends that G-d was indeed watching over us.

One day, late in 1944, while we were working on those ditches, Adolph Hitler and his entourage came to see the defense lines. Our guards froze at the sight of him. It was as if the earth shook. They shouted, "Der Fuhrer ist da!" (The Fuhrer is here.) We watched him pass by, from east to west on the horizon, clearly visible on the bright fall day. His khaki longcoat flapped in the breeze and he waved his baton to and fro as he strode by with his officers. To me, it seemed that he flew by, driven by evil winds -- a Satan. The SS soldiers guarding us, old Vermach veterans who had been injured in the war, snapped to attention, and saluted their Fuhrer. "Heil, Hitler. Heil, Hitler." They kept this up

until the group disappeared from view.

While we worked on those tank graben (trenches), German workers driving horse and buggy carts brought huge garbage cans full of our noon soup allotment out to the work site. It was the same soup we had in Auschwitz, except for those few white potatoes. Our new guards were somewhat more humane, and one who seemed to be a kinder sort, sometimes gave a little extra soup when he saw that a person tried harder. I made sure to work feverishly whenever he passed by me. Unfortunately, the total soup allotment never varied, so if one got more, somebody else got less. But by this time, I cared for no one but myself. I had no fear. I didn't even shake when Hitler walked by.

When I realized that this one guard was not as cruel as the others, I made sure that I joined the work line under his supervision. "Organizatzia" (organization) became my way of life. I figured out every step before I took it and I took every step possible to ensure my own survival, no matter how dangerous it might seem. ' Organizatzia' was the key word in concentration camp life. Every second of every waking hour had to be organized if one were to survive.

The meager soup only served to increase our hunger. We were always hungrier after we finished the allotment. On the verge of starvation, my senses became acute. I could transport myself at will to my mother's kitchen and recreate the foods she made. I could smell and taste every

delicacy she served. I would start telling my friends how Mamika made stuffed cabbage, about her shimmering golden chicken soup, the roast goose, gribenes, the cholies and the pastries she baked for us. The ecstasy of this recreation was so immense that when the work whistle actually blew, the emotional letdown that followed was devastating. We returned to reality grudgingly. We didn't allow ourselves the luxury of these escapes too often for fear of the physical and emotional toll we paid for it. This was one dream the Germans couldn't touch.

It was harvest time in Poland. The farmers were digging potatoes in the roadside fields we marched by after work. One day, the crippled old Vermacht guard motioned to us to go near a smouldering fire left by the potato workers. All day long, the potato workers baked and ate as many potatoes as they wanted. Our guard gave us permission to glean the leavings of the fields. All four hundred of us scoured the barren field for leftover potatoes. And he gave us time to bake them. Not all of us had the good fortune to eat a baked potato, but we all had at least one real potato. I baked mine through and through and ate it charred and delicious. Then I went over to our crippled guard who was marred by Hitler's war with a limp and a deformed hand. I thanked him. I couldn't tell him that he was fulfilling my Biblical tradition that permitted the poor to glean the harvested fields.

We lined up to return to the barn, and as usual, I took my place near

the middle so that I could see what was going on. That was a good move because all hell let loose up front as we neared the farmer's gate. The farmer yelled, "Halt," and stopped our guards. Strange men with the farmer called our guards forward for a discussion. I stuck my neck out and saw that the people ahead of me were being searched. Like a bolt of electricity, the message ran down the line. "Get rid of the straw." We realized that the farmer must have noticed that a lot of straw was missing from the barn. We had stuffed the straw between our dresses and coats, back and front, as protection against the bitter cold Polish winter. Without the straw, we could have frozen to death while working in the open fields in only a slip, a dress and a paper-thin coat. I did not waste a second. I got rid of every twig of straw in my possession. The ground I stood on was littered with it

When my turn came for inspection, I was as innocent as a newborn babe. That was organizatzia!

We worked every day digging those ditches. I took advantage of my small size to escape the howling winter winds. Using the pick I was given, I worked my way down toward the bottom of the ditches where the bitter breezes could not reach me. From sunup to sunset, I swung that pick, developing biceps that serve me well to this day. Mud encrusted my beautiful blue boots that cracked and faded but never left my swollen feet.

As if the work were not enough, on a Sunday, the guards' weekly day

of rest, two white-clad German nurses ordered us outside. We lined up facing our barn and the adjacent tool shed where the nurses stationed themselves. One by one, our women entered the shed. When they came out the back way, they yelled to us that the Germans were taking our blood.

Incredible! First they dehumanized us and treated us like diseased rats, a pestilence they were determined to stamp out. Then they turned around and used our blood for their injured fighting men. I swore to myself, "Over my dead body! They will not get my blood." When the knife cut off a piece of my right ear in a preliminary test, I willed my body to collapse at the nurses' feet. I was so convincing that they kicked me to one side in a useless heap. I held my breath and waited. That was no time to react. The bleeding went on and when the commotion reached its highest peak I found my chance to steal away, victorious.

The German farmer made it clear to us that we were there against his will. The military overseers who inspected regularly made sure he carried out every order from the higherups. In turn, he proceeded to make our lives as miserable as he could. He pitched cattle dung into our straw-covered sleeping area. He forced us to clean his horses, to clean animal waste from his yard, and shovel snow from the driveway and surrounding areas. He went into a rage when anyone died. Then we had to load each body into a wheelbarrow for the German workers to haul far away from the farmer's property so that no trace would be found. This

ordinary-looking farmer, dressed in civilian clothing, could have acted more humanely towards us, yet he seemed bent on our destruction, both mental and physical. The incongruity of his civilian appearance and his evil actions profoundly affected us. I saw him as a snake spitting its venom, spewing out evil on us with every breath he took.

My constant companion, hunger, took over one night. Dead tired, I was unable to sleep. I was starving. Every part of my body sucked inwards, gnawing and grinding at me. In agony, my brain would not let me rest. All around me in the dark, my friends suffered as I did. Moaning in pain, they too thrashed about in the filthy straw. I had to do something for myself. If not, I knew I would not make it through the night. All sense of normalcy had long gone from my existence. Right and wrong meant nothing to me. When I saw the answer right in front of my eyes, I knew I had to go after it. There it was, the canteen hanging from the waist of the only person who had revealed any shred of compassion towards ~~me~~ us since my incarceration. The old Vermacht guard who had let us find potatoes in the field, who gave me a little more stock in my portion of soup, and for whom I showed eagerness to work, had the canteen from which he sipped during those bitter cold winter days. I knew I had to get to it. Not twelve feet from me, the old man lay stretched out on the straw on his left side, his back to me, snoring the night away. His SS armband reminded me that if I got caught, my life was not worth the straw

he lay on.

I crawled towards him, dragging my skeletal body across the dirt floor as fast as I could move. Without removing the canteen from his waist, I twisted off the cap and put my mouth to the narrow opening expecting to drink warm coffee. Instead, a fiery cold liquid filled my mouth. Real whiskey heated my throat and flowed through me in an instant, warming every fiber and sinew of my body. I swallowed three or four times, in great hungry gulps. Satisfied, I carefully replaced the cap, and eased back to my straw resting place where blessed sleep came quickly and peacefully. Many times, my friends and I had discussed our chances of survival. We specifically talked about survival depending on the amount of nourishment we got. So now I dared not tell my friends what I had done for fear that the knowledge of my night's adventure would put their survival in jeopardy.

On New Year's Day, January 1, 1945, after two and a half months at hard labor, we were ordered to leave the farm. The whistle blew, and we were on the road, walking once again to an unknown destination. The Vermacht guards did not leave with us. Instead, SS men and women were in charge. We understood then that the road ahead would be much worse. And we were right. Many of our people were near death, so sick that they had to be carted from the farm in wheelbarrows. How generous, I thought. But only for a fleeting moment. As soon as we were a short distance from the

farm, the line stopped.

The women who were pushing the wheelbarrows were ordered off the road, across the drainage ditch, into the tall pine forest away from the dirt road. And the sick women who could no longer keep up the pace had to follow them. The guards ordered the wheelbarrows to be dumped and brought back to the road, where horse driven wagons and their civilian drivers collected them. What was happening in front of our eyes was so shocking and so devastating that we thought we were all doomed for the same fate. In the forest, the two young SS women took out their pistols and shot each helpless soul through the heart. Mothers and daughters who had somehow managed to stay together throughout the train ride to Auschwitz, through the selections, through the farm work and through the bitter cold winter, now were torn apart. Mothers saw daughters shot before their eyes. Daughters screamed in terror as their mothers fell before them. The Germans threatened the survivors, yelling, "Mach lose, Mach lose." (Get going, or you'll meet the same end.)

We were standing still on the road, watching and listening as this horror unfolded. It demoralized us. No longer was there any barrier between us and the actual destruction of our people. There was no longer any pretense of meals or baths or clothing. The Germans killed at random, playing their own bizarre games of chance with our lives.

While we waited for the next move, my beaten feet demanded care. My

boots had finally separated. The shoe part hung by a few threads. The soles were gone and my frostbitten feet stuck out of the shoes. The upper boot was embedded in the skin of my swollen calves, cutting through to the bone where body lice infested the sores. I sat down on the dirt, ripped out the lower part of my coat lining, and wrapped my swollen feet so I could continue marching. The women guards returned and blew their whistles to start up the march once more, as if nothing had happened.

Again we were on the road, marching in fives. ~~Several weeks later,~~ SEVERAL TIMES DURING A DAY THE sick ones were again weeded out. This time, they picked my friend Chaya, who had been hopping along next to me on one foot since her other foot was too painful to step down upon. The SS woman motioned to three us to walk deeper with her into the evergreen forest. There she took out her gun, aimed it at Chaya, and this beautiful young person just slumped down to the ground without a sound. Then the German bitch ordered me to pick up Chaya's clubbers and put them on. Why me, of all people? For the first time since Rifka died, I thanked G-d for taking her because she would never have made it this far, let alone suffer so much on this deadly march. I stuffed straw from my bosom into the big clubbers to make them fit over my bandaged feet and torn boots.

On the road again, Hanah, a girl close to my small size, replaced my dead friend Chaya. In our agony, we needed friends desperately and looked out for each other as we walked for endless hopeless days. The line

of march shifted according to Germany's fortunes. If their army went forward, we marched at a steady pace towards a destination. When the Allies advanced, our route changed. We were pushed away as far and as fast as possible. It seemed we marched in circles, depending on the battle lines.

We crossed the Czechoslovakian border at Marien Bad, once called Marlove Vary. When we reached the top of the hill overlooking the spa, the SS ordered us to go down the steep, snow-covered embankment. Winter set in early in Czechoslovakia and the first snows were followed by cold and more snow with no humidity or rain, so our journey down the treacherous slope was difficult. When my wooden clubbers fell off in the deep drifts, I held them in my hands and let myself roll down the hillside. I figured it right and landed at the bottom in good shape.

Hoping the guards would let us go into the spa for the night, we sat on the hard packed frozen snow while the SS people went inside. After all, we were Czech citizens. The guards finally reappeared, picking their teeth with toothpicks, their flushed faces clearly demonstrating how well Germany took care of deserving people. Bitterly we realized that to them, we rats deserved the treatment we were getting. The whistle blew and we were ordered to climb up the embankment. They could have easily sent us up the nearby road, but as usual, they had us do it the hard way. Pitch black night fell before we were all accounted for.

At the next town, we entered a big auditorium where we collapsed on the floor in an exhausted stupor. When we awoke the next morning, we were amazed to discover that the Czech people here were permitted to feed us and talk with us. They were the most gracious hosts, and kept us there for two days, giving us three meals a day. We conversed in Czech. They knew where we came from originally, and told us that they had hosted other transports that had come by. They told us to rest and not to talk --rest and eat. They also told us that they could not offer us rich foods because we were not used to eating regular food. They said they were not allowed to tell us any news. We understood.

We were so grateful for their care, that some of our girls cried, wanting to stay. But there was no escape with the SS watching every second. They could see how kind these people were to us. The Czechs persuaded the SS to remain there for two days, and served them beer with 'saite cseke knediky' (large doughy balls filled with plums). If we had eaten such heavy undigestible food, we would not have been able to walk. We did have plenty of soups filled with potatoes, Czech mushrooms and beans. Large soup pots were left so that we could serve ourselves as much as we wanted. And when we left, we each had an apple, bread, and hard cooked eggs for the road. What a feast! Returning to the march was doubly hard after such tender care. We recrossed the German border and again we were at the mercy of the Germans day and night.

Our dirty bedraggled bunch shuffled into Dresden with its beautiful red roofed houses surrounded by white picket fences. As we walked along the side of a street, I noticed a German woman standing at her open door, looking at our miserable group. I was hungry and couldn't resist a chance to find food. Like a wild animal, I ran up her front steps, directly into her whistle clean kitchen. I pushed her aside as I passed and picked up a pot of warm milk that was on the stove. I swallowed the boiling milk and the thick skin that covered it while the woman started screaming. I ran out as fast as I came in. Meanwhile, the rest of our people got the same idea and disappeared in all directions. I was back in my place, unnoticed, when they returned and got beaten for their escapade. Once more, my luck held. And once again, I thanked G-d that my little sister was not there with me.

Almost 400 women had left Auschwitz, and less than half entered Dresden. Every day, the number dropped. When we stopped at Mathausen, one of several concentration camps we stopped at overnight, I realized that although we looked bad, those inmates looked worse. Again people gave me good advice. One woman told me to always stay back, stay behind, if it is possible. But how and how soon? That question stuck with me.

The march went on. Events seemed to happen faster. Every day people were left in the forests for dead. They just keeled over and that was the end. Somehow I had the feeling that I would make it, a shred of hope

that kept me going. But now we marched with no food at all, so I decided to take my life into my own hands. Marching along the streets of the next town, I noticed the unmistakable sign of a bakery. Pictured on the billboard sign were a round bread like Mamika used to bake and a long golden loaf. As we approached the bakery, the aroma was unbearable. Fearless as a wild animal let loose, I raced into the bakery, past the bakers as if they were mere specks on the wall. I grabbed one long bread from the hundreds on the shelves, stuck it into the bosom of my dress down towards my stomach, and ran back to the transport. The women saw me before the SS did. They knocked me to the ground, and tore at my clothes and at the bread. Then the SS bastards saw the commotion and struck at us with their bayonets. Nobody cared if they got killed or not. All they wanted was my bread. In the tumult, the bread was crushed and torn to bits. It dissolved into dust before anyone could get a bite. And bystanders who saw the melee, stood watching. Not one dared to come forward to offer us food. Nobody benefitted from the loaf. The SS guards couldn't figure out who had started it all because we all looked alike by then, like primitive muscle men with huge bewildered eyes in our shallow sockets, staring at a world gone haywire. Barely an inch of stubble grew on any head, and our filthy faces were covered with layers of grime. Ragged and desperate, we were capable of anything and of nothing.

That night we were led into a recently vacated barn. The sight of the wheat shredder, full of partially shredded wheat stems, and the cows udders loaded with milk, filled me with hunger and longing. As a child, I had fetched milk every morning except Saturdays. Oh, how I longed to be back home again. I swore I would never again complain, not ever. I could barely wait for the SS bastards to leave and lock the barn. Eventually they went to sleep in the farmhouse and locked us in. I went to the cow, placed both my hands on her swollen udder and squeezed her lifesaving milk right into my mouth. That warm sweet fluid brought me back to life. We all took turns, but this was my show. I think the cow enjoyed our visit because we relieved her of her heavy milk. Then we munched on the nourishing wheat stalks that tasted delicious to me. But the rough stalks irritated my swollen, diseased tongue and my sore gums which were peeling back from my teeth. Chewing the wheat stalks with my spongy teeth was a slow, laborious process but worth the agony.

We stayed there another day, one that will remain with me forever. The farmers were nowhere in sight. The deserted streets resembled a ghost town. And in one corner of the barn sat sugar beets. How I would have loved to sink my teeth into one of them. But I didn't dare. The SS men guarding us killed for less reason. But we were bitterly hungry and starvation cancels out common sense. A nineteen year old freckled blonde named Feiga (bird), one of three sisters who still remained together,

could not resist those sugar beets. She took one and before she had a chance to taste it an SS guard picked up a common fork that farmers use to pick up animal dung and rammed it into her chest. Feiga was so emaciated that she just keeled over. While her sisters cried and wailed over her body, the SS beasts warned us, "If you touch anything around here, this is an example of what will happen to you."

I couldn't take it any longer. I asked my friend, Hanah, if she would join me and stay right there in the barn when everyone left. She agreed. We didn't know how we would do it but we found a way. At night, we lowered ourselves, our skin and bones bodies, into the two shredders. Normally, it would have been impossible to do such a thing. But when your own life is at stake, the mind takes over and no risk is too great. I only knew that if I stayed with that transport I would not survive. As our numbers dwindled, the bastards gained more control over us and chances to escape lessened.

Morning came. The barn door was opened, the whistle blew and we heard shouts of "Rous, rous yidishe ferfluchte werber." (Out, out, you Jewish bedeviled wives.) When the count was off, the SS went wild, running crazed around the barn. Finally it became quiet. We waited for dark before we came out of our hiding place. I did not trust them for a second. I did not forget for a minute that Eichmann had told us in Auschwitz that the war would soon end. Under that assumption, I planned

to hide out in the forest. Hanah agreed. I remembered the nearby bombing we had heard while we were in Auschwitz. On the farm, the bombing seemed muffled and further away from us. We discussed it among ourselves and didn't care if we were hit, anything to end the killing and the suffering.

On the death march, we had witnessed the destruction of major cities, including Berlin. We were marched through Berlin on a sparkling white tiled road, referred to by the SS beasts as Hitler's Auto-Baan. There we were, walking on his private road. What a mess. No wonder those bastards were losing their grip. The plague-infested Jews walking on their leaders' white mental halo? Can this be? Has the world turned upside down? They tried hard to kill us all off and almost succeeded. I for one was not going to give them that pleasure.

We marched on and on, not knowing what was going on. As they led us aimlessly around, we encountered many Germans on the road with their families and belongings carted by a horse and carriage. They looked down trodden. But the sight of us threw them into orbit. As we approached one caravan, they swung to one side as if encountering lepers. They were well fed, well dressed, clean. The sight of us made them move faster.

I hoped that we reminded them of the consequences of their deeds. We are the ghosts that will haunt you, I thought. By worshipping Hitler, the mass killer of Jewish people who wanted to make the world 'Yuden rine (free of Jews), they too became killers of innocent children. We were the

end product of their Fuhrer's madness. We looked at them with our bulging glassy eyes, hungry and without fear. I forced myself to stare at them with all the anger in me. Look at me! See what you people let happen to another people! With my eyes I told them, I hold you responsible just as if you yourself did this to me and to my beloved people.

Once we were out of that thresher, we filled ourselves with milk, gave the cow some hay, and ate a sugar beet. We were on our own and we enjoyed it. We did as we pleased, in spite of the uncertainty that hung over us like lead. We ventured out into the forest when we were sure it was deserted. Suddenly, a brown shirted boy came out of nowhere and called out, "Halt." This thirteen year old with his hair cut like Hitler's wore an SS armband. We stopped in our tracks. Without further conversation, he blew his whistle and marched us a long way to a house. A woman opened the door and the serious boy told her where he found us. They locked us in the basement with the window open. She told us that if the situation were reversed, we would not act any differently. With that she locked the door and left. Oh G-d, what a night we spent in that bitter cold basement! Surely the nourishment we had that day saved us.

About midmorning, a guard from another transport let us out and there we were again. This bunch looked as bad as we did so nobody even noticed us. The two guards with this group were much older and moved more slowly, which was fine with us. These disheveled guards wore tattered uniforms and

looked sickly to me. They wore no Nazi insignia. They began looking for shelter much earlier in the afternoon than our last guards, so I felt pleased with our new situation. Best of all, once a day we got some gruel. But I could swear we had walked this route before.

We had no pride, no shame. It was nothing to lift our clothes and 'make' right in front of the guards. We had been reduced to animals and behaved like them. My body was in agony. Open sores covered my skin. Body lice sucked on me from head to toe. My swollen feet and my legs above my boot tops were frostbitten.

The day came when none of us was able to walk another step. A guard left, then returned to tell us that we would be put on a train. Slowly and painfully we walked until we reached an area far behind a train station where no one was in sight. They packed us in cattle cars like sardines, sitting back to back. I cried in pain as the tall person behind me lay against me like a heavy rock. I pleaded with her to move, but nothing helped. For more than three days, we travelled like that. No food, no rest, no air. No one needed to go to the bathroom because we had nothing in our bodies to eliminate.

When the doors finally opened, I was blinded by the light. Two thirds of our young women were dead or dying. Anyone who did not move was thrown out of the car in a heap. As the rest of us climbed down out of the car, we were given a portion of bread. They had more then enough since so

many had died. One woman dared to take two portias, and got the beating of her life for it. They counted out the exact number of portias of bread and subtracted the number of dead and found that one was missing. The person who got two portias had to come forward and admit it. Poor girl. She still had the two pieces in her hands. She had no fear. Hunger brought on insanity, not fear. To this day, I cannot go hungry for long. The expression I use is, "I cannot have Germany in my stomach." I hate to waste food, but my cupboards and my refrigerator are always full.

I was surprised when they gave us bread after that terrible train ride. We landed on the train tracks far away from the main station of Hanover, where we were met by SS and other officials. In the distance, we heard loud booming. The noise gave me hope that soon the bombs would stop these viscious killers. Again we were lined up in fives, to resume the treacherous march. And again, I tried to line up in the middle of the transport. I was truly amazed to be among the living. Maybe, I thought to myself, maybe I will survive this unbearable crazy time and have a chance to tell what Mengelle did to us and how he took away my little sister.

Dead bodies littered the tree lined roads we marched along and more corpses filled the drainage ditches along the roadside. I thought nothing could throw me, but the sight of all those young bodies made me wail to the heavens. How much more, G-d? When will this end? We walked on and

on. I began to understand the purpose of the bread. The bread was to sustain us long enough to get us to our final destination.

From the station at Hanover, we were marched through an industrial area and then down an endless tree-lined residential street under a budding April canopy. We marched a day and a night and in the morning, after passing through a neighborhood, totally silent but for crowing roosters, we arrived at Bergen-Belsen.

We were herded through the gates and fell among the dead, wishing the ground would open up and swallow us. When I came to, all I saw were bodies everywhere. Skeletons were dragging other skeletons. I wandered around, picking my way among the dead and came to the main square. There I saw a towering pile of bodies, a pyramid of corpses piled as high as a three-storey building. I wished I was one of them. I could not bear life any longer. I was afraid to look at any dead face for fear I would recognize someone. I was ready to give up. All I had to do was to lie down next to them and be finished with it all. But I did not. Something within drove me on. Here in the most civilized country in the world, I was standing in hell. I saw a depository of human beings, mutilated in every possible way by the most intelligent people the world had known. I saw cruel suffering etched in the young distorted faces, evidence of the excruciating torture they had endured at the hands of the Germans. Arms and legs twisted in agony. Women with no breasts. Male genitals withered

to nothing.

I had to find shelter for myself. I was all alone and on my own. Barracks that reminded me of chicken coops faced each other across two sides of the square. Afraid to venture too far from the gate, I headed for the nearest building. Inside I found a bare spot on the floor next to the building's center pole, and sat down next to an older woman. We spoke, she in Yugoslavian, I in Czech, and after awhile, understood each other as neighbors do. She told me she was a political prisoner because she did not believe in the Nazi ideology. She had been arrested, and when the Germans emptied the prisons as they fled the Allied advance, she was caught up in the transports of prisoners and brought to Bergen-Belsen. She curled herself up in the fetal position and just gave up. She died there, next to me. I closed her eyes. Poor Ana. Then one by one, the barely living, themselves near death from starvation and mistreatment, helped to undress her, taking whatever piece of clothing she wore. Four of us together had trouble dragging her skeletal body outside. We treated her as gently as we could, considering that we had no strength. Enfeebled though we were, we knew we had to separate the dead from the living. We put her to one side where we hoped no one would step on her. There were no orders from the Germans. Once inside the gates, we were on our own.

I found Hanah, my little friend from the long march, dying of dysentery. Along the road, she had picked up a bone and chewed on it. I

begged her not to eat it, but she was starving and would not listen. I talked to her about our future, about how we would go home, meet our families, and go to Palestine. She said, "You will go, not me." Diarrhea weakened her so that she could no longer stand on her feet. Helplessly, I watched her die. She was eighteen but looked like a ten year old. We were so close that sometimes I did not remember that she was not family. Her death made me feel as if I should be dead too, after all we had gone through together. She died. I lived. I could not understand it.

Kapos (collaborators) carrying out the Germans' commands, ordered anybody who could walk to pick up and drag the skeletons to a ravine where the Kapos threw lime on the bodies and set them on fire. Skin and bones, gaping mouths, staring eyes. Each body took us a day to move because we had no strength. Four of us, always out of step, one walking, one falling, one pulling a leg, another grasping an arm, struggled towards the edge of that rocky dirt ravine. It would have been so easy to slip down into that ravine with the body but once again, something pulled me back from the edge.

Chaos was the order of the day. With no structure to camp life, I began to 'organize' myself. Mentally, I took charge of my existence. I did everything possible to stay alive. I went to the kitchen where I helped carry the garbage pails of soup to the barracks where I stayed.

helped to bring

Then, since I brought the pail, we had to bring it back. That gave me the opportunity to get some extra licks from the pail. With no honor system, I took the first 'porcia' (portion). But you could still only take one share because the Kapo made sure that there was only one 'porcia' per person from that barrel. Once I got my soup, I staked out a space on the floor in one of the barracks. No longer did anybody know me or I them. Those of us who finally fell into camp just got lost. I was never in the same barracks two days in a row. I organized in such a way that when a soup line formed at one barrack, and I had already had soup at another, I joined the line, my heart beating faster and faster until I received some more soup. This was such a frightening experience that I did not dare to repeat it. It was not worth it.

The filthy, lice-inhabited clothes I had worn since I left Auschwitz, fell into shreds. And my body was riddled with deep lice- infested sores. I had to 'organize' to get fresh clothing. Meanwhile, rumors flew that liberation was near. But nothing stopped death. Body lice and unsanitary conditions spread typhus through the camp. People were dying left and right. Finally, the day came.

LIBERATION

Our camp was liberated on April 15, 1945, a day that must go down in infamy. One moment later would have been too late for many of us. Immediately, the SS guards tried to escape. But the gentile prisoners of Bergen-Belsen, in much better shape than the Jews, captured them. The prisoners caught the SS men and women, put them in a truck and rode them around the camp. People threw stones at them and ripped their clothes. Vengeance took over. The sight brought back the words of the German woman when Hitler's brown-shirted youth captured us and brought us to her doorstep. She had said that if it were the other way around, we would do the same. At that moment, I realized that she was wrong. We Jews were not killers of human beings.

The SS deserved everything that came their way, yet I was uncomfortable about it. I too could have thrown a rock to cause them pain, but I did not. I wanted them to live to stand trial for their inhuman crimes.

The day the SS started to disappear, the political prisoners broke into a warehouse. They were looking for precious jewelry. I was looking for fresh clothing and walked in as they were attacking the neatly folded piles of garments stacked like bolts of cloth up to the rafters. In their search for treasure, at least a dozen people tore apart the piles of clothing that had been taken from the poor souls brought to the camps.

As I rummaged through a pile, I spotted the coat of my next door

neighbor from Svaljava. The sight of that wool coat splashed with green, brown and grey, flooded my mind with memories - - of her beautiful trousseau, her embroidered lingerie, the most intimate thoughts she had shared with me. I could not touch the coat, let alone take it. I was sure she was dead because I remembered her going with her child to the right during Mengele's selection on our arrival at Auschwitz.

Instead, I found a dress and a black Svakara fur coat that fit me nicely. Right there, in front of the men who were tearing apart the clothing piles, I stripped off my dirty rags. By this time, stripping meant nothing to me. Every time the murderers lined us up for anything, the first order was to strip down. When I got my clothes off, I looked myself over. Every vein in my body showed on the surface of my skin. My chest was that of a child. My breasts were gone as if my body had regressed ten years. I could not behave like a twenty year old, but became a hurt little child again. I found myself crying endlessly under my burden of loneliness strangely grateful that little Rifkallah did not have to suffer more agony.

Somehow I got a knife and painstakingly removed the remainder of my boots. I had to cut them loose from my swollen and frozen feet. My legs from the ankles up were covered with lice-infested sores.

I left the warehouse, content with what I had organized for myself, and came to the open square where everyone who could was scurrying around,

also organizing for themselves. Suddenly a low flying plane appeared to the side of me and "Manah" from Heaven came down right in front of me. People went berserk screaming, 'du es essen' (here is food). I caught a small can of Pet condensed milk, and others caught Swansons Chicken. I tried, but I had no way to open the can. I kept banging it against a rock, but I was too weak and the metal was too strong. Those survivors who did manage to open their cans, died soon after. The food was too rich for people who had been starving for two or three years, depending on when they were taken prisoner. A lot of people died the day of liberation because of this well-intentioned food drop. I tucked my precious can of milk into my waist with my piece of rope, my depository. I heard shots coming from nearby and saw people falling to the ground.

I knew there were many genuine murderers among us because the Germans used hardened criminals for work in the immediate area of the camps. The only way I knew them from the political prisoners was by their normal well-fed condition. Now they ran out of camp and ransacked the neighboring area and brought their loot -- including live chickens--back to camp. I stood by watching the unbelievable spectacle of those prisoners roasting live chickens over an open fire. I was astonished.

With my milk can tucked neatly away, I began crossing the square to my barracks, when I broke out in a drenching sweat, swayed, and fell to the ground. I came to, surrounded by dead bodies lying all around me.

Blue-uniformed doctors speaking English went from skeleton to skeleton around me, checking for signs of life. Someone said, "Look her over, she's young." He put a stethoscope to my heart, listened for an instant, and ordered me picked up and put in a delousing van. I heard the word, 'typhus', and wasn't surprised since I was infested with disease bearing lice.

I was picked up gently by two young English doctors who handed me over to the disenfecters. Once again, I was stripped naked. I was used to it by now. But this time, I felt only gratitude towards these dear people who treated me with care and kindness. They put me on a stretcher and slid me into the disenfecting van. My clothes went through the same process.

Later I was transferred to the town of Celle, where huge red brick military buildings had been turned into a make-shift hospital for the survivors of Bergen-Belsen. Once there, I was carried in and placed on a straw mattress on the floor with other sick people. I hovered between life and death, burning with fever, for a month, and was only aware of seeing a doctor once. Delirious and haunted by the celapel whistle, I tried to get up to go to be counted, and had to be restrained. People died around me daily. When I heard a certain sound coming from a dying person, the final rattling sound of the breath, I knew that death was near. It had become a familiar part of my daily life.

I remember that if I didn't reach for the food that was placed in

front of me, after awhile, it disappeared. We had very little nursing care. I remember getting medication only once, when a doctor visited me. The typhus had to run its course. When the crisis came, I knew it. One moment I was delirious and burning up with fever, soaked in my own sweat. The next second, my temperature dropped below normal. The horrendous shock to my body jolted my heart into palpitating so rapidly that everything in front of my eyes swirled around. My heart fluttered, and I felt as if it would stop beating altogether. It was unforgettable— a devastating, frightening experience that left my heart permanently damaged.

As I began getting better, I enjoyed the luxury of not always doing what others commanded. But that whistle stayed with me for a long, long time. I asked my roommates if they felt the same way about the whistle and they said they did. As our conditions improved, we helped one other. But my illness and the accumulation of more than a year's deprivation made me a total invalid and I had to be carried by stretcher wherever I had to go. After the crisis, I was transferred into a ward with four beds, each occupied by a recovering typhoid survivor. Food was specially prepared for us.

I started to think about going home. I remembered my father's words, first at home and then when we met in C lager at Auschwitz, "After the war, Lajchuka, you and Rifkala go home."

Suddenly young men who could barely walk, appeared, one at a time, looking for their families. Anguished eyes looked at us, searching for a sister or maybe, for a mother. The fortunate ones who had escaped the dreaded disease we suffered towards the end, moved freely, desperately seeking their loved ones. We were bewildered at hearing their reports of what a far-reaching effect the war had had on the entire globe. We were simply overwhelmed. So many people lost their whole families. The vastness of the tragedy began to sink in. The horror stories told by each survivor were very damaging to our psyches. Every person had his own unique story of survival.

Tragedy brought us together. Our shared experiences made us into caring human beings, highly protective of each other. This attachment is lasting to this day.

What shall we do now? Where shall we go? Where does one go from here? I only knew I had to go home.

These young visitors, the men who passed through looking for their families, asked me, "What if your father did not survive? What then?" I answered that I had two brothers. Did anyone know anything about Dudie and Bencie Kopolovic?

What to do? Where to go? What is the answer?

One day, some International Red Cross officials came to speak to us about our next move. They gave us two choices; either to go to Italy or

to Sweden for our recuperation. I said that I had to go home. One official asked me where was my home. I answered the only name I knew for my area, Podkarpatska Russ (at the eastern part of Czechoslovakia). He said to me, "There is no life there for you for now. You have to go to a country like Italy where there are places that were untouched by the war, or Sweden, which stayed out of the war altogether. Once you regain your health you will be able to go home, but not now."

I listened to him carefully, and said I would go to Sweden, but only for a short time. "Please, write that down next to my name, only for a short time." I explained to him that I chose Sweden above Italy because I once read a story about an Italian Robin Hood who robbed the rich and gave to the poor. He also inflicted pain upon the well-to-do, and I believe that one has to work for the things one gets. No one has the right to take something away from somebody else."

"We understand how you feel," he said. "You and your people have been violated and humiliated. I am sure you cannot stand any injustice and will probably always feel that way." (Truer words have never been spoken.) I asked how my family would find me. He said that the way I looked and felt, my family, if any survived, could not take care of me, and in all probability, my family was being taken care of also.

Since the war, injustice of any kind has me going wild.

Once the decision was made to go to Sweden, wheels were set in motion

to take us there. I felt the deepest sense of appreciation for the kindness of my English liberators. They picked me up from among the dead, deloused me, and saw me through my life and death struggle with typhus. As much as I feared to leave Bergen-Belsen for an unknown place, I began to anticipate new things to come. Life became more precious to me as each day passed. I felt my body begin to heal. Every day I got a little stronger. With help I could lift my head. Then I learned how to sit on the bed. It took a long time to comprehend how helpless I really was.

The day came when our departure was announced. Nurses placed each patient on a stretcher. Four former German soldiers, their coat lapels ripped, their medals stripped away, carried our stretchers on their shoulders. They did not look at us and could not touch us in any way. Once arrogant SS soldiers, they had been shaven bald and moved like mechanical robots, only looking down. As I was being carried, I thought to myself that here was my chance. I could beat the hell out of them, and nobody would stop me. What a laugh! I was as weak as a fly. Instead, I was humiliated for them. Look, I said to myself, what your fuhrer reduced you to. He made you subservient to the Jews. This is what happens to people who believe themselves to be superior above others. A British soldier accompanied each stretcher to the train.

During the trip from Celle to the port of Bremerhaven, we retraced the agonized last leg of our march from Bergen-Belzen to Hanover just a few short months

before. I looked out the small ambulance window at the trees lining the road and saw nature in all its summer glory, unaffected by the events that had taken place. I wondered if anybody out there was aware of what was going on in all those hellish places I had been. A terrible loneliness came over me. I must be getting better, I thought. Until now, I was so sick physically, that I could not indulge in such speculation. I soon realized that physical pain was preferable to the anxiety that set in.

In Hanover, we were placed in individual sleeper cars of Red Cross trains for the journey to Bremerhaven. I made sure that my black Svakara coat and the can of Pet milk that I caught the day of liberation were transferred with me. Aboard the train, Red Cross nurses cared for us, reassuring us that all our needs would be met. We were not to worry about anything. We were under the care of the International Red Cross.

Transfer to the ship went smoothly and once aboard, I found myself being interviewed. I was told that the interview was being listened to all over Europa. In German, I was asked how I felt and how many people were in my family. I answered that I was brought from a death camp where there were so many dead people that they had been piled up as high as a three-storey building. I remember saying that at the time, I was so weakened by hunger and disease that I had no strength to think about what was happening around me. But now that I am stronger, I feel so badly about it that I am afraid to think about it. We had been a famiily of

eight people.

The interviewer asked if I thought that any of those dead bodies could have been a member of my own family. I answered that they did not have to be. I felt badly for them anyway, because the suffering that we had endured bound us together as brothers and sisters. "How old are you," he asked.

I said "Twenty-one."

"For such a young person, you are full of wisdom. To what do you attribute that?"

"When I lost my Mother and two little sisters in the gas chambers thanks to Dr.Mengelle's selection, and then I lost my other sister, Rifka in yet another selection by Dr.Mengelle, I became a thinker. And the things that went through my mind made me feel very sad for humanity." When he asked me to explain, I told him that never in my wildest imagination did I think human beings were capable of such evil as I had witnessed.

"Will you ever forgive them?"

"Forgive them? Never! That they will have to seek for themselves. I believe in justice. That we prevailed is justice in itself. They must be brought before a tribunal. The world has to know what happened. We are the witnesses."

The overnight boat trip brought us to Malmo, Sweden, where we were

once again moved by stretchers. Lo and behold, spread out before us on the ground were a mass of tents. I asked if this was where we were going to live. "Oh,no," came the answer. " This was erected just for you. You will be given a real Swedish steam bath and massage."

At this point, I was holding on for dear life to my coat and milk can. When my turn came, I did not want to part with them, but I was promised that my belongings would be returned to me after the bath. What happened next was the surprise of my life. Taking off our clothes meant nothing. That was easy. In the tent were young Swedish men in uniforms, with red cross bands on their sleeves. They were gentle and kind to us as they gave us a steam bath and a Swedish massage. They took their time, leaving it to us to say when we had had enough.

Like children, we began discovering that there was more to life than suffering. The delightful experience had us giggling as unexpected feelings of shyness welled up in us. I looked around in amazement at my friends, who, like myself, were returning to life. We were no longer the invalids who had left Bergen-Belsen. The life force within us surged outward like a powerful stream. It seemed that as soon as we were treated humanely, our bodies and minds responded accordingly. The changes were visible within a short time. In the steam bath, our bodies began to sprout like seedlings, and joyous happy feelings drew us a little further out of our misery. After the wonderful treatment under the tent, we were

each wrapped in a blanket and then given a present from Count Folke Bernadotte of Sweden. The gift was a slip, a pink slip at that, my own first piece of lingerie. Count Bernadotte welcomed us to Sweden. He shook hands with each of us, wished us a complete recovery and told us that he was fully aware of what we had gone through.

The Count's words reassured me. After leaving Germany, I was very concerned with how the world would react. Would people believe what had happened to us? Could they? Would the evidence be destroyed? For the first time, a feeling crept inside me that at first I did not understand. But slowly, it came to me. I felt guilty at staying alive when so many others did not.

Why was I spared against all odds? I knew right then and there that I will never be the same.

After the bath we were given a light meal and our first dose of vitamins including cod liver oil capsules, and were housed overnight on the premises. The next day, our group was transferred to a huge hall in Malmo where each nationality group (we were three; Polish, Czech and Hungarian), staked out an area for itself. We received a Czech flag and stationed ourselves in the center of the stadium because Czechoslovakia is situated in the center of Europa. The flag, the symbol of our homeland, brought back fond memories of our first president and the constitution through which our government functioned.

We were kept in quarantine in Malmo for one month, surrounded by all kinds of health care professionals who attended to each person with the best possible care. I was examined from head to toe and appropriate treatment was prescribed. Survivors with lung problems were immediately separated from the rest of us. We were told that tubercular patients would be sent to special places for their recuperation.

Painful separations began all over again. Two sisters were parted, one from another. It was horrible to see. No matter how much assurance the girls received from the doctors that they would be reunited within a few months, they would not be consoled.

"Months. That is an eternity. Why can't we be together?" they cried. "Please, please don't separate us! There are just the two of us. Please don't take my sister away from me." The sisters held on to each other for dear life.

The doctors explained that tuberculosis was a contagious disease and that the patients would be sent to a sanitarium in the mountains where they would receive special care, good food, and fresh air. At this point, we were all crying like little children. The doctors and nurses were crying as well, no longer able to function as professionals. They walked out of the room, leaving us alone.

After awhile, we quieted down and they returned. In their absence we had talked it over among ourselves. What the doctors said made sense. So

we tried to help the patients with the problem to understand that these were well meaning people who wanted to help us and we must put our TRUST in them. That's what it came down to—trust in another human being. This we had to get used to in the beginning. It was very hard to do. Slowly, we accepted new ideas. Slowly, cautiously, we adapted to our new situation.

I took a liking to a young girl named Devorah. I desperately needed the love of a sister and she seemed to need someone like me. My earliest memories were of taking care of my little sisters, and I needed that kind of belonging, not just being a member of a group. After all, I was one of four sisters. So I took on an older sisterly, protective role with her. Unlike anybody I had ever known, childlike Devorah reminded me of a dwarf. Like a puppet on a string, she was small, had a large head, and always smiled. She was so appreciative of her surroundings, as if the war and its effects made her the happiest ever. Before long, I couldn't stand her smiles and demanded an explanation.

She told me that she came from a family of nine children and was illiterate. She felt that the war was made for her. Here, for the first time in her life, she was well taken care of. She received plenty of attention, was accepted, and was totally happy to be with all of us. She said she had never had it so good. I felt sorry for her, and thought to myself, " what an empty head this poor soul has."

She had completely wiped out her past and very easily embraced the

present. She was one of the first to speak Swedish fluently. Then, she simply stopped learning. Eventually she found a factory job and we lost touch.

When we started feeling better, we went out in the sun. For a sun dress, I used the slip given to me by Count Bernadotte. We had heard that many Swedish people had come to see us. And there they were, in a roped off area of the driveway at the front of the stadium where we stayed. We were as curious about them as they were about us. Our visitors looked at us as if we were something different. We were. Most of us were short with dark hair, and very thin, while they were tall and blond. Although we could not communicate with most of them, a few spoke German, one language we didn't want to use. But the Swedes were so kind to us that we used it anyway. We soon learned a few Swedish words and delighted our visitors by using our new language. They were pleased and wanted to know everything that had happened to us. They brought us trinkets of all kinds, even some made of gold. And with their gifts, they gave their hearts.

Thanks, many thanks to the Swedish people and their government for their kindness, their generosity, and their most sincere best wishes for better tomorrows for us. I am forever grateful to the Swedish people for getting me up on my feet again and restoring my faith in humanity.

While in Malmo, I was taken to a hospital for treatment of my frostbitten feet and for dental problems such as Hoof and Mouth disease

caused by lack of vitamin C. You could play piano with my teeth—they were so loose. Five upper teeth simply fell out of my mouth. They did not have to be pulled. Thanks to the good care I received, I gained strength with every day.

From Malmo, we travelled by train to Goteborg, the second largest city in Sweden. We went to the outskirts of the city, to Robertshojd, a large summer camp, where we were lined up by two's and sent into individual cabins which contained eight bunk beds and a pot bellied stove. All 300 of us met for meals in the cafeteria where we sat on long wooden benches, ten to a table.

A Frenchwoman in my cabin enthralled us with tales about her life as a Parisian prostitute. Much older than the rest of us, she was captured by the Germans, and sent to a concentration camp. She might as well have been a Jew, she said, for what she went through. We were so inexperienced about sex that her stories held us spellbound. Her one desire was to return to Paris to pick up her life again. The letter she received from her relatives, confirming her identity and stating that they wanted her back home in Paris, convinced the officials to let her go. We were happy for her, happy that she had family to return to. None of us were that lucky. She promised to let us know how she fared. She kept her promise with a letter about her journey home and she wished us the same. At that point, our homes seemed very far away. I had an unsettling

feeling that I would never go home again.

Life was easy in Robertshojd, maybe too easy because we had too much time to dwell on our problems. My heart started giving me trouble. Out of nowhere, it would suddenly begin racing like a fast motor, frightening me. I did not know what was happening. I did know that lying around not doing much did not agree with me.

One day I went into the office and asked Fru Bergren, the woman in charge, if I could be of any help. She matter-of-factly answered, "Yes. You will be the 'in-between' between this office and the 300 girls who live here." Her words gave me an incentive for being. As an official employee of the Swedish Red Cross, I was paid fifty 'ore' (cents) a day and worked in the outer room of the three room office. Everyone was free to come in as far as the gate at the office entrance where I greeted them. From my desk behind the gate, I listened to their needs, and repeated the message to Fru Bergren. Within three months, I became fluent in Swedish just from sitting there, listening to everybody speak.

We received telegrams daily from all over the world from people seeking their loved ones. Our girls began to hear from their families. In those days a telegram was read over the telephone before it was sent out with a delivery man. Every day, we rejoiced with good news and cried with the bad news. One day as I was seated at my desk, I answered the telephone to hear the operator ask for Lenka Kopolovicz. That was me! I

became very excited. I said, "It is she, speaking in Swedish."

She read a telegram:

"Dudie, Bencie alive. Nothing about Father. Letter will follow. Signed, Dudi Kopolovicz."

I promptly passed out of the picture. I came too inhaling some kind of chemical at my nostrils. I told Fru Bergren what I just heard over the phone. She comforted me and with her kindness, made a lifelong friend. "Min kara lilla Lenka" (my dear little Lenka), she called me. A tall lovely blonde, Fru Bergren was fluent in English, French, Spanish, and German. She related how she had worked in the Swedish Consulate in Prag before the war. When she learned that her fiance, a Jewish Czech Army officer did not survive the German camps, she tried in vain to contact a member of his family, but none survived. She shared the story of her loss with me, knowing that only a person who lost as much as I had would understand her pain. I have never lost that capacity to feel another's pain.

His family loved her so much that they entrusted their family jewels to her. She wore a ring given to her by his family, and wanted to give it to me when I left for America. I couldn't take it. It meant too much to her. But I did accept another.

Fru Bergren's assistant, Ingrid, a woman in her early forties, invited me to her house for dinner. A Sunday afternoon pass from

Robertshojd was easily obtained and Ingrid picked me up in her car. My first automobile ride was that trip from Robertshojd to Ingrid's parents' home, conversing in German. A maid opened the front door and escorted us into the library where I met Ingrid's elderly parents. To my surprise, they quickly revealed to me that they were Jewish. Ingrid had never mentioned it.

What followed could have been a scene from the movies. We sat at a magnificent table laden with delicious food while dinner was served by a white gloved butler. Finding the right silverware to use was enough to throw anybody. I kept my composure as well as I could. This was my first time, 'out of the woods', so to speak. Ingrid's parents urged me to eat as much as possible, saying that I needed fattening up. I took it in stride because I saw that they were extremely kind people.

After dinner, we returned to the library for demi-tasse coffee. I had never tasted anything so delicious! The only coffee I knew about was a mixture of chicory grain and fresh ground coffee. What a difference in taste!

Ingrid's parents continued their conversation as if they needed to unburden themselves. Originally they had come from Germany where her father, a fine looking gentleman, imported tobacco. Her mother told me that they lived a very low key life because of uncertainty around them during World War II. Even their domestic help were unaware of their

Jewishness. Yet in their hearts, they were Jewish. They asked me what I thought about them.

"You had to do it to survive," I said. "But now there is nothing to fear. You could come out of your hiding." This afternoon was not one to discuss with my friends, so I kept it to myself.

Ingrid became romantically involved with a younger man, a handsome blond officer on the campus. Her lover was also married. The management felt that the couple was not setting a good example for us --three hundred budding young women. So, Ingrid lost her job. Occasionally, I spotted her car waiting on the street near the campus. After a while, that too stopped. On the High Holy Days, Ingrid's family appeared in the Temple. I felt good about their decision because I knew they had been troubled by living without an identity.

Soon after I received the telegram, Dudie's letter arrived describing our father's death in Buchenwald on the day of liberation. It confirmed my worst fears. Ever since I had seen him and Bencie in C Lager, I had known in my heart that there was no way my forty five year old father could have survived the brutality heaped on him. We survived because we had our youth. Dudie wrote about his trip home to Czechoslovakia. He had found strangers living in our house, people who told him to warn Tatika not to return. "Tell your father better he not come home. He was burocrat. There is no place for him. If we point a finger on him, we can have his head

chopped off by the Russians occupiers of our land."

He was also told that the Jews of Svaljava had been held in the Temple overnight before they were shipped out to Auschwitz. So, before he left Svaljava, Dudie went to the Temple where he had his Bar Mitzvah, where so much of his young life had been spent. He went to look for some sign of our family. He found the building in ruins and in the trash that littered the floor, he found a folded picture. It was the photograph of our family taken outside of our house on a warm summer day so long before.

My brother Dudie left for Prague and on the floor of the train he found a piece of newspaper on which names of survivors were listed and to his amazement he found my name amongst the others. What a miracle! He contacted the International Red Cross which gave him my address in Sweden.

From my earnings of fifty cents a day for my work in the office, I saved money to send care packages to Dudie and Bencie in Czechoslovakia. I sent coffee, cigarettes, cocoa, spices, chocolates, shoes and warm clothes. I had to ask for an advance in my pay for postage. Finally, the package was mailed and I waited to hear that it had been received. Their answer came and I sent a second bundle. Unfortunately, the day the second package left, my brothers managed to cross the border back to Germany. Their trip was difficult because the Russians were starting to secure the borders but neither brother wanted any part of the Russians.

I had not felt well since before Dudie's letter came. Although some of the girls got back their menses, I did not. I couldn't eat or sleep. My heart flip-flopped all over the place. And the tension in my bosom was enormous. Meanwhile, the Swedish people coud not do enough for us. We were entertained continuously. Special stage shows were presented for us. We saw Carmen, The Tales of Hoffman, Edith Piaff in concert, Tosca, and numerous concerts --all free thanks to the generosity of the people of Goteborg.

They expressed their kindness in many ways. One day, my English friend Freida convinced me that an outing would make me forget my troubles. Freida's parents had been caught on the streets of Europa and shipped to Auschwitz where they died, leaving her on her own. We decided to go to Goteborg to look around, so we got passes and left Robertshojd on foot. We walked about a mile before we boarded a trolley car as the guests of the Swedish people. That was exciting for me, especially when the nice people insisted on giving us their seats. We were a novelty in their eyes. Freida loved to eat and I willingly went with her into a lovely, busy restaurant. The waiter looked at us as if we had fallen from the sky. Then he gave us menus. We could not understand them. Suddenly, I spotted Hungarian Goulash, and we ordered it by pointing to someone else's dinner. The waiter bowed to us and walked away. Eventually he returned and placed piping hot individual casseroles in front of us. We served ourselves the delicious reddish food,

commenting to each other about how spicy it was. We ate it anyway and when the waiter handed us the check, I almost passed out. What would we do? We had less than ten kronen between us and what about a tip? "What do you mean, tip?" I asked Freida. She said her father always gave some money to a waiter for good service and it was expected. I was twenty one years old and had never before eaten in a restaurant.

The waiter noticed that we had a problem. He pointed out that the meal was a la carte, something new to Frieda and me, and went to fetch the owner. We explained to the owner where we were from and pleaded with him not to call the police. We told him we had free carfare and promised to come back when I got paid at the end of the week. He would not hear of it. He said we did not have to pay at all. It was his pleasure to have us eat at his place. We could pay later, someday when we have money.

Meanwhile, a well dressed gentleman at a table across the room motioned to the waiter, who spoke to him, then took the owner aside to talk. The owner told us about the kind man's offer, and assured the man that he would absorb the cost of the meals. We became so flustered over the affair that we could hardly wait to get our feet out of there. We were not content until we were on the trolley back to Robertshojd. But the episode was not yet over. We both became very sick that evening, and wound up spending the night in the infirmary suffering from severe gas pains and diarrhea.

The next day, Fru Bergren informed us that we had been invited to see the Ringling Brothers Circus. I was delighted because I had loved the circus since my childhood. We were also invited to pick out a complete outfit of clothing from a department store. Dressed in our new outfits, our excited group sat in a roped off area under the big top. Freida and I had the best seats under the tent. There we were, trying to take it all in when the big top, the people, and the lights suddenly began spinning around me and I fainted.

I came to in the hospital, attended by kind nurses who assured me that I would be alright. After two weeks, my physical condition improved and I was sent to a psychiatrist. This Jewish doctor, (he made sure I knew it right away), listened to my story and suggested that my fainting spell came from the effects of the crowd. The many people, the noise and the huge hall reminded me of my first sight of Auschwitz. I realized he was right. The circus had taken on the sights and smells of that horrible place I thought I had left behind. It would take many years for me to overcome that feeling. In fact, I try to avoid such places.

"What else bothers you?" he asked me.

"People I do not know".

With that, he removed his jacket, ordered hot cocoa for us both and made me feel at ease. Out of nowhere, he remarked, "You know what? They all go to the bathroom. Don't ever let them scare you. The world will

never again allow such horrors. There will always be wars, but the world will never again tolerate another Hitler." We shook hands and said goodby. I was discharged from the hospital the next day.

When I returned to the office, another girl sat at my desk. I thought I was through and was heartbroken until Fru Bergren welcomed me back, saying I would be in charge of the supplies. The new job was tough on me, because all of us were slowly adjusting to freedom. Some girls actually denied getting supplies despite their signatures on my supply sheet. The management understood. Possessions took on extra meaning to people who had been stripped of everything. Fru Bergren advised me not to make too much of it, just try to explain the best I could. If that didn't work, give the girl the item and settle it peacefully.

I was alone in the office the day that the handsome, dark haired Israeli 'shaliach' (messenger), Victor, arrived. The twinkle in his black eyes made me fall for him in an instant. In Swedish, he explained that he had come to encourage as many girls as possible to make 'aliyah' (to live permanently in Israel). What timing! Someone so caring, and so attractive had to have an impact on our group of emotional and vulnerable young women. I was delighted to receive a letter from him, professing his love for me. How comforted I felt, having someone care for me in a special way. His attentions chased away the aching lonliness that had consumed me. Cautiously I warned myself to take it easy, to slow down. I

reminded myself that he had not yet met the other girls. I decided to play it cool.

For our first date, I received a pass to see the movie, Gilda, with Rita Hayworth. She was larger than life and I felt bigger yet. When I explained how I hoped to meet my brothers in America someday, Victor said he understood. I had no idea how long they would remain in Germany, where Bencie was convalescing in Hitler's former mountain retreat of Bayern, but I knew that seeing them would come before I could consider immigrating to Israel.

We did not 'fool around' in those days, and I told Victor of my high moral standards. I paid homage to my parents by living by their teachings. "All I have is myself, and if I were to give myself to a man it would have to be in marriage," I said. He respected me for it, he said.

We had been dating for two months when Victor invited all 300 of us to a program of classical music and Zionist indoctrination. After playing records, he talked about all of us belonging in Palestine, soon to be a Jewish state. I was sitting in the front row, feeling smug about our relationship, when a stunning young girl walked in with a friend. I happened to have seen her the same afternoon at Robertshojd bathing her alabaster body in one of the wooden bath tubs which we used whenever we pleased. Jet black hair framed her china doll face. A long seige in a tuberculosis sanitarium may have left her pale, but her dark saucer eyes

sparkled with pent-up energy. She was gorgeous. Everybody looked her way when she walked in, including Victor. That was the end of our romance and the beginning of theirs. Within a few months, they married and left for Israel. I was heartbroken. He was my first love.

Fru Bergren knew what had happened and invited me to her summer home where I met her brother, Eric. Sad eyed Eric, a serious philosophy student, soon became my good friend. He lived with his older brother and sister-in-law, Vania, in a simply furnished room, stacked with books from floor to ceiling. The understanding couple worried about their younger brother because he continued to brood over their parents' death many years before. They welcomed me into their family, saying I was just what Eric needed, a little friend to care about. And care he did! Tall blond Eric had passes to all the movie theaters thanks to his position as movie critic for a Goteborg paper. Not to have to pay for a ticket to a movie seemed marvelous to me.

Eric Gyberg introduced me to an academic life that started me thinking of things other than myself. I enrolled at Goteborg University where I studied English composition and rhetoric among other subjects. His entire family included me in their activities, inviting me often to dinner at their city home. Everyone dressed for these formal affairs and sat very still while the maid placed hot serving dishes in front of each one so we could help ourselves. Swedish meat balls and yellow cake are still my favorite

dishes.

Often as I sat feasting at their table, my mind wandered back to my days of terrible hunger. All of this had been going on while we were starving to death. I could not for the world of me figure out why this was so. Yet I did not begrudge them or their country. I was glad for them. We had suffered enough for the rest of the world.

The family invited me to stay overnight around Christmas. Early the next morning, in that dark Swedish winter, singing awakened me. Vania and the maid came to my room, carolling "Santa Lucia". Dressed in long white robes and wearing wreaths in their hair, they carried lit candles and a tray of coffee and Swedish 'kåka' (cake). These wonderful people gave of themselves to get me and my friends back on our feet. I will never forget their remarkable kindnesses.

An older nurse at Robertshojd ran a nursing home in her own house. When I accepted her invitation to dinner, I met all her residents and nurses and her elderly husband. The gentle loving care of their patients impressed me greatly. In no time at all, these kind people introduced me to the young son of their next-door neighbor. Walter had recently graduated from University with a major in engineering and was a devil of a guy. By our second date, this tall brunet chased me around the barn, wanting to have some fun. I had to convince him that in our culture, girls remained virgins until marriage. He could not accept that. He could not understand

my refusal. He would say, "It's a nice day. The sun is shining. The birds are singing, I feel good so why not?"

After I succeeded in getting his promise that he would behave as a gentleman, we went hiking. On our return, our good friends invited us to dinner, and like doting mothers, quizzed us. Where had we been? What did we do? They even asked if I would stay on in Sweden and marry him.

They worried over me, concerned about my hollow look as they called it. Nourishing foods and the best piece of meat filled my plate. Mrs Larsen regularly checked my mouth to make sure all the sores were healing and that my jaw came back into position as I gained weight on my face.

They showered me with affection and attention, more than I had ever known. My parents had loved me, but with six children, they had to spread their love around. Here, I was the one and only for this elderly couple who were surrounded by other old sick folks. My being there, they said, did them a world of good. I was so different culturally, physcially and religiously, that they were fascinated by me. The more I told them about my home life, the more they wanted to know. "The Good Lord brought us our little Lenka," they said as they lavished presents on me, a golden watch, a ring with a cultured pearl, and a necklace I wear to this day. My first overnight pass grew over several months time to two nights, until I decided I needed more time with younger friends. I found the Gyberg family more interesting, especially Eric, who treated me as a

young lady and his equal. I recognized the changes taking place within me as I no longer wanted to be treated as a child and needed more independence.

While I was in Sweden, my brother Dudie remembered the name of our relative in America. He wrote a letter to the 'Gantz Family in New York' and somehow it reached Ossining, New York where a second cousin, Benny Gantz and his wife, Irene, lived.

They remembered Dudie because he was supposed to emigrate to America and get an education. Of course our mother could not let her oldest son go overseas. Mamika regretted that decision many times.

"If only Dudika escaped these horrors," she would say, and tears would fill her eyes.

As soon as our relatives heard that we survived, they began to do all they could to get us to America. Dudie gave them my address. In their first letter to me they asked if I, too, wanted to come to America. I wrote back, saying that as long as Dudie's and Bencie's destination was America, so was mine.

My Gentile friends were very disappointed with my decision to leave Sweden, but life had no meaning for me without my own family. Explaining this to them was complicated since they had done everything in their power to undo the wrongs done by another people. The compassionate people of Sweden brought me back to life and I will be forever grateful to them.

As we recuperated, one by one, we were sent out to work in different cities. Most of us stayed just long enough to prepare for a life elsewhere. But some stayed, fell in love with those handsome blond, blue-eyed Swedish men, and married, starting new lives right there.

I became disturbed and restless after I was left on my own. I was angry, angry at the indifference shown by the world toward the Jewish people, my people. I began to read the Swedish newspaper and little by little, I learned the extent of the tragedy that befell us. Six million dead, half of them children. As I remember it, there were more children than adults.

My body weighed heavily on me. I moved as if the whole world's witness rested upon me. The more I thought about it, the worse it got. I ceased living the life I knew and turned away from everything that would give me peace. I became an angry animal all over again. I no longer cared to eat kosher foods. I purposefully ate pork, rode the tramway on Shabbat, and felt rotten through it all. I was hitting back at the world. But the world went on its' way, unperturbed about my feelings. So, one

day, I looked around and took stock of myself. I came to the conclusion that Hitler had done a good job on me. That frightened me. I asked myself if I would let Hitler prevail over me! Never! My disposition changed instantly. And so did my life.

With a new outlook, how could I consider marrying out of my religion! Should I finish what Hitler left undone? Then there were my parents. Should I kill them all over again? Then their lives certainly would have been lived in vain. I took stock and decided to live my life in homage to them.

I cherish the years I spent in Sweden, and the refuge which gave me the chance to come back from devastation. I cherish the caring human beings who restored my faith in humanity through their unlimited goodness. I will be forever indebted to them.

Dudie reached America first. He came on a full scholarship to the University of Wisconsin where he earned an undergraduate degree in pharmacy. His four year student visa required him to return to Germany, but lucky Dudie met and married a lovely young woman named Lorraine Eder.

Bencie, waiting in Germany, so hungered to be with me again that he took the photo I sent him of myself, put it next to his own and made a new snapshot of us together. He sent me a copy with his note,

"You see, Lajcsuka, our pictures are on my dresser side by side as if we were together once again." His puffy face revealed the effects of

the kidney injury he was recuperating from. He was sixteen years old when a Nazi beast had kicked him in the abdomen, bashing in the tube leading to the kidney.

Later, Bencie came to America as a displaced person, vouched for by our relatives Benny and Irene Gantz in Ossining, New York. I waited for a place in the Czechoslovakian quota. Every time I called the American Consulate in Goteborg, I came closer to America and drew further away from the people who genuinely cared for me. It was scary. I carried my burden of pain deep inside me. I worried about how Americans would receive us. The Swedes had seen our plight firsthand. Now that we looked like everybody else, how would we be able to communicate our feelings towards the loss of our loved ones? And how would we deal with the drive to tell our story, to serve as 'witnesses' to the unspeakable tragedy?

Eventually we all moved out of Robertshojd to jobs and lodgings in different cities and towns. Frieda and I were among the last to leave Robertshojd. We rented a place for the summer of 1947 from a Goteborg family who spent their summer by the sea.

A position in the office of a large department store chain was created for me. I updated employee pension records. It was a breeze. I didn't reckon on the other office girl's vacation period. Ingrid's job involved calling every branch store all over Sweden fortheir daily reports which she then compared with the prior year's dates and figures.

She reported all this to the president every day promptly at ten o'clock. Ingrid was a stunning young woman, who never failed to inform the rest of us how the boss looked her over each morning as she entered his luxurious office. Only after she finished this early routine did she relax. If the president called her back to his desk, she went into a frenzy, upsetting all of us, including Brigid, the filing clerk.

The day before her vacation, Ingrid showed me which forms to use, where to find last year's data and about thirty phone numbers. Her parting words warned me that if ever I made a mistake in those figures, the world would come down on my head. The pressure of those next two weeks was incredible. I could not sleep. The noise in my head became unbearable. All day I walked around as if somebody had clobbered me over the head. I could not take the pressure. On a Friday at the end of the two week period, the president walked in, sat at my desk and started typing a check as he talked to me. He hoped the job had not been too much for me. He realized how difficult it must have been for a foreign-speaking person to listen to all the different Swedish dialects. I was taken aback, surprised that this formidable character had placed himself in my situation, and was so considerate that he did not burden me with typing out the check for several thousands.

"Oh, no. Not at all," I said, relieved. Gradually, I relaxed and enjoyed the job.

My girl friend, Frieda, ate from the moment she came home from work. She grew heavier and heavier until she could barely roll out of bed. We ate different things, and never cooked a meal together. There was no need to cook because we used ready made foods. We were overwhelmed by the prepared items we found in the markets. We bought delicious fishes, cheeses, breads, crackers, delicatessen and sweets of all kinds.

At work, the company served a daily buffet lunch in a handsomely decorated dining room. I spent many wonderful lunch hours together with my working friends. One day I helped myself to what I thought was beef hash with a fried egg on top. I was eating it heartily when one of my friends asked me how I liked it. I said I did and they all broke out laughing. When I asked what was the joke, they told me I was eating horse meat. I could not believe that horse meat tasted so good, almost as sweet, in fact, as dark goose meat. What's next in store for you, Lenka? I thought to myself. Once I knew what it was, I could never again eat horse meat.

Frieda left for England at the end of the summer. I had to find another place to live. I answered a newspaper advertisement listing a room to rent. An elderly woman who took care of people's feet showed me a couch in the living room she had for rent. Behind the couch was the door to her single son's room. She assured me that he used the back entrance only, was seldom home, and sometimes had young ladies stay overnight in his

room. She worked in the living room behind a privacy screen.

It sounded good. I could have breakfast and dinner with her. That sounded even better. I said I would take it.

Eric and I told her that I would soon be leaving for America.

"You need fattening up," she said, suggesting that we would get along famously. Eric helped bring my belongings over and I moved in.

Mrs. Swanson immediately took charge of me, giving me orders about how I should behave in her house. For instance, if she had early appointments on Saturdays, I must get out of bed early so the customers would not wonder who was behind the screen. Then she proceeded to announce my presence in her home as if I were a charity case, despite the fact that I always paid my rent. Mrs Swanson entertained her customers with stories from the newspapers about people from the concentration camps and applied them to me. As a result, I stayed away more and more. Her business seemed to improve while I was there. Her customers looked on me with pity in their eyes and more than once, someone pushed money into my pocket. I spent very little time there, rarely ate dinner with her and stayed away on weekends whenever possible.

Once in a while, her son, Gunnar and I talked while I waited for Mrs. Swanson to prepare the bed for me. He wanted to know what I thought about my job and about Sweden's socialist system. My impression was that people were well cared for by the government, with socialized medicine

and old age benefits. They had roofs over their heads and didn't fear war because their country was neutral during the Second World War. Gunnar believed that having no struggle in their lives made the Swedes drink too much. He said they had the highest suicide rate in the world because there was no purpose to life, no motivation unless a person excelled in some special field.

I tried to tell him how much I thought of his people. Strong family ties, kindness and compassion towards others, a beautiful modern country --all were admirable qualities that I appreciated. Instead of convincing him of my point of view, all I aroused in him was the feeling that I spoke as all young people did. He felt that way once, he said, but now, being older, he saw things differently. I told him that he should marry one of those lovely young women he brought home, and have children who would rekindle those lost feelings. That way he could insure the future of his own flesh and blood.

"For one so young, you speak in the voices of generations," he said. He was right.

"I am very old when we speak about lost generations and generations yet to come," I told him. "We must make sure to have a safe haven for them on this earth of ours. That will depend on how we plan our future here and now."

Then he asked the usual questions:

"Why are you leaving us? What is wrong with us?"

And I answered the only way I could,

"I am leaving to be with my brothers." He was aimless, living only for the present, doing nothing for the future. I lost patience with him.

Six of us went out for an evening boat ride to one of the islands. Eric , his sister, and brother-in-law, Solveig and Harold, Eric's brother Rutger, Rutger's wife, Vanja, and I set out on a motor boat, my first such excursion. Everyone of these bright, well educated people questioned me, some even trying out their German on me. They served smorgasbord style, Swedish seal fish, fish eggs, and assorted cheeses. I knew the fishes were not kosher, but who cared! I was going to have a good time, no matter what! I was determined to be just like the people I lived among. The harder I tried, the less I succeeded. Out of nowhere, a dark cloud came over me and I knew I was not like them nor would I ever be. I was back into myself with all that horrible pain gnawing at me without mercy. My friends tried to cheer me up. They understood how I felt.

"There we were having all this fun while your people were being systematicaly destroyed," they said.

Eric, ever the philosophy student, reassured me that it was normal to feel that way while the pain is still fresh in one's mind. In time, he added confidently, I would gain better control over my thoughts. By the

time we turned back, way past midnight, the men casually mentioned that there were no stars in the sky, and there we were out in the Atlantic Ocean. The motor boat kept moving ahead towards our destination when suddenly gigantic waves came at us. The men spread their arms and legs wide, balancing themselves to ride the waves. The women kept bailing out water as fast as possible. I was petrified. To me, these people who grew up on the water were masters of the seas. I was convinced that I would not survive the trip. When we reached the shore, they asked me how I liked it.

"Was not the sea pretty mad?" "Would you come out with us again?"

"Not by boat, that's for sure."

The Larsen family invited me to their summer cottage near the ocean for a two week visit. We packed their car for the drive through picturesque countryside dotted with painted white cottages. By the seashore, boats danced on the waves as far as the eye could see.

Such peace prevailed. I could not believe that with all the horror and devastation all over Europa, such a lovely place could still exist on the face of the earth. The contrast shocked me. All I could repeat was, "How beautiful, how beautiful." My reaction to a place they took for granted seemed to awaken them to its charm.

"Yes, yes," they said, "We are grateful for beauty that surrounds us. We are happy to share it with you. Now, let's go catch some mackeral

for dinner."

They placed an open basket in the ocean, and held onto the string attached to its lid. As soon as weight and motion was felt by the person holding the rope, he pulled it up and sure enough, there was a mackeral. We caught them at will and ate them as soon as they were cooked on the open barbecue. I became the official fish catcher for our stay. I learned to recognize a fresh fish and have fond memories of those weeks with the Larsens.

I had a date for my passage. I was about to leave Sweden for the United States, leave the known for the unknown. The people at work arranged a going away party for me and even the company president came. They presented me with a gift, a crystal vase, a Count Folke Bernadotte crystal embossed with forget-me-not flowers and a folder signed by every person. We cried our goodbyes together, these loving people who made sure that we knew there were still decent people left on this earth and this grateful person. I am forever indebted to them.

My friends lavished jewelry, flowers, and goodby parties on me. When I finally moved out of Mrs Swensen's house, the Gybergs made room for me with their family. I loved staying in a house with children around, and felt as though I belonged there. They worried about the reception I would get in America. Did I know anything about the American relatives? How large is their city?

All I knew about Ossining was that it had a famous prison. People had been electrocuted in Sing Sing prison. Rumors had it that when an electrocution took place, all the lights went outin the town. Their misgivings unsettled me. I knew what I had in Sweden. I did not know what lay ahead.

Devoted Eric reminded me that I always had a place to come back to. We said our goodbyes and I walked on to the ship, Gripsholm, with a heart full of appreciation for the people who did all they could to make me whole again. Those two and a half years brought me back to life. Thank you Sweden. Thank you for everything.

Many survivors from all over Sweden were booked on the same February 1948 passage to America. I found three Robertshojd friends on board, girls who had been working near Malmo. Fanny and I shared a cabin with me in the top bunk, while Judy and Helen, who were sisters, shared the cabin opposite ours. Several young Czechs were aboard, men from our area of the country. One came by swinging an aged salami by a string, pleading for kisses in exchange for a bite. The enticing aroma made our attempts to play hard to get even harder for us. But they didn't give up easily. The minute one would head up the ladder to get ahold of me, Fanny pulled him off nd I would hit him over the head and make a lot of noise.

Once the ship began moving, the smells and the motion overcame me. I was so seasick I couldn't think of the beautiful dining room or the

bountiful food. "My head hurts," was all I could say as I lurched back to my cabin. But no matter how ill I felt, I checked the daily log and recorded our mileage and the weather conditions in my note book.

Fanny and I became close friends during our voyage. Like everyone else, we were planning to go to relatives in America, and referred to them as our aunts and uncles. We exchanged addresses and promised to keep in touch. We had become family because of our experiences.

We say we have this'thing' together. We understand better than anyone else, that although we survivors look like everyone else on the outside, inside, emotional turmoil waits just below the surface.

A young man approached me with a proposition the day before our departure from Sweden. This Herschel had diamonds which had come from the Bergen Belsen store house of victims' clothes. He proposed that I carry the diamonds in my pocketbook during landing in return for one brilliant diamond. It would make him happy and no one would be the worse for it, he said.

Right away, my brother Dudie came to mind. He was awarded a four-year paid scholarship to the University of Wisconsin as a result of his honesty and leadership in the displaced person's camp. Would I, his sister, jeopardize my future in my new land? There was no doubt about my response, and I refused to do it.

That didn't stop Herschel. He propositioned another young woman who

took him up on it. Then she turned the tables on him and after disembarking, she disappeared without a clue. Poor Herschel. He later settled in Florida and wrote to me many times, mourning his misfortune.

THE UNITED STATES

The captain gave me $25.00, money to guarantee that I would not be destitute when I arrived in the United States. The money and my ship ticket were provided by my second cousins, Irene and Benny Gantz, the same people who helped me secure my visa for the United States. I came in under the Czechoslovakian immigration quota.

With a trembling heart I stepped off the ship Gripsholm on a bitter cold winter day, February 23rd, 1948, and laid my eyes on the most generous lady I was ever to meet, Irene Gantz. She and her best friend, Margaret Moshkowitz, waited for my arrival on that cold snowy day. Irene pointed to a statue in the distance, and speaking in Yiddish, she identified the Statue of Liberty who welcomed many an oppressed and persecuted person who came to our shores, "people just like you," she said. "Welcome to America, to the land of the free, and may you find happiness." She embraced me as she spoke, and I remember clinging to her for a long time. Her kind face and her concerned questions about my health dispelled any doubts I had, at least for a while.

"I left them behind," I told my cousin.

"Whom did you leave behind?"

"My family, and all those who perished."

"We will help you if you let us. I know," she said, "we can't replace your family. We would not even try. You are young. Some day you will have your own family. But for the time being, you belong to us and we belong to you."

Her words were so assuring, that I stopped looking around for my friends from the boat. They had disappeared as if the earth had swallowed them.

I saw by their red noses that neither Irene nor Margaret were dressed for the weather, and I told them so, in Yiddish. They hired a cab to take me and my baggage to the train station, where we transferred to the train to Ossining, N.Y.

I remember my first impressions clearly. The masses of people of different colors and shapes milling about amazed me. I was used to seeing only white people, and my face revealed my thoughts. Irene warned me not to look at people who were different from us that way. She said that I would invite trouble if I stared at them. But within a matter of seconds I had seen an astounding variety of nationalities, and the sights startled me.

"You will get used to seeing them after awhile," Irene and Margaret said. Margaret seemed nice but unfortunately the way she wore her beautiful long hair braided and wound into a crown around her head, reminded me of Irma Krause in Auschwitz. Luckily, Margaret was not blonde.

I knew I didn't have to think about those horrible places, but any sight or situation could throw me back there. I really and truly wanted to give myself a chance to start to live anew in this new land with people who cared for me, but the past wouldn't let go. When I did manage to put it aside, something nagged at me, bothering my subconscious. I felt that there was something very important that I was supposed to do but had not done. My subconscious wanted to dominate my conscious mind. This state of mind, never easy to live with, caused me actual physical pain every waking hour. The nights were no easier. Then I lived through the torture of what I had suppressed during the day.

Years later, it still doesn't take much to throw me right back to hell. My biggest struggle has been the need to overcome this feeling, and not to let Hitler prevail over me. I handle it. I have it under control. I wish it were one hundred per cent.

After many years of searching, I came to the conclusion that men created evil on this earth, not God. At the same time, knowing that such evil rests in a human being is demeaning. I saw good fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters who without conscience, inflicted cruelty on other human beings. As a sane being, I found it incomprehensible that any human being could act so bestially. In my worst times, when I didn't care if I lived or died, I took the luxury of observing these mad beasts who made our lives unbearable. Analyzing them took me away from my own misery. I am

sure that if they had seen my facial expressions or had read my mind, or heard me when I know I spoke out loud, I would have been chopped down with the bayonet without any remorse. How many times I wished for release from my agony. I looked at the beasts and said, "If there is any justice in this world you will pay for this! What did we ever do to you that you should do this to us? God in heaven will see to it that you will receive due punishment."

I never gave up that thought, never lost that hope. My sister Rifka's cries to the heavens the night after Mengelle's selection rang in my ears. You beasts will pay for it. Some day your reckoning will come. It has to. Somehow those thoughts helped me, gave me a bit of relief in the most bitter times.

As I walked the streets of New York, all those memories flooded back through my mind. Yet there were also feelings of anticipation of good things to come, and of my victory. In time, justice did win out. I heard and read about the Nurenberg Trials in Germany. The world did learn what happened to us. Please help me warn the world that, if mad men are allowed to rule without mercy, this is what happens. If our losses meant anything, let them be a warning to the world that IT COULD HAPPEN AGAIN, TO ANY PEOPLE. Our tragedy must serve as a reminder to the world of man's cruelty to man.

As I looked out the window of the train which took us to Ossining,

N.Y., I could not get over the vastness of this country, United States of America. All those high buildings one after another, the noise, the rushing around by people, the subways outside the tunnels and people eating everywhere at all hours of the day. Stores everywhere, smoke coming at you from all sides, steam coming out of the ground. Buses, taxis, cars, trucks coming from all directions. "Gosh," I said," this is a mad place but it's inviting at the same time. Is it like this all over America?"

"No," they said to me, "you will like Ossining N.Y. It is a quiet place. You will like it but you will want to come to New York every once in a while. They have good shows. Macy's and Gimbels are here."

"What are they?"

"They are department stores where you can find all the things you want under one roof."

I was astonished at all the things they were telling me and I agreed that I too would sure like to come to New York once in a while in spite of all the tumult and the smoke. As we stepped down from the train, a welcoming committee, friends and family of my relatives, greeted us.

Ossining is a suburb of New York and in 1948 it was a quiet place consisting primarily of a main street where most town activity took place. Once you passed by downtown, it was country. We came to one of those tree lined streets where almost every house had a car in its driveway, but few

people were in sight. It struck me peculiar that in bright daylight no one was outside. "Where are the little kids?" I asked. I was told that women as well as men worked. Weekends were usually devoted to leisure times and family activities. I was made to understand that the streets were not lined with gold but rather the streets were there to take you on the journey to success. I knew then that I would have to put all my energies into learning the English language and getting the material things money can buy. I had missed out on so many things in my young adult life that I felt I had to catch up with my peers. I was so vulnerable.

My cousins Irene and Benny were very kind to me. They and their three children, Jean, Roberta and Alen, did all they could for me. I remain forever grateful to them. When Irene, a fine gentle soul, died in 1952, I was utterly crushed. I lost my mother all over again.

I met cousins Joe and Sarah Hoffman in New York. Cousin Joe had known me from infancy. Such darling people to be with! They did not have much but what they did have they shared with others. On my first visit to their house, Joe insisted I take a gift of money from him. When I refused, he found a way to get it to me. On my way home to Ossining, N.Y. I put my hands into the pockets and there it was, $15.00.

That same Sunday, I was taken by car to a coat factory owned by Sarah's relative. Their two children, Michael and Carolyn, followed in a second car, all of them so happy to go with me. A coat I needed, they

said, so there we were, cousins Ben and Irene, Joe and Sarah, the kids, myself, going, being together, part of a family again. What a wonderful feeling. Yet something was not right. I felt uneasy. I had to stay and think. What is it? Why can't I be happy? Here I am in America with people who care for me, one of them even knew me from back home and that is a rarity for a one like my self. What is it that will not let me enjoy life?

Again, I was nagged by guilt that lurked beneath my skin. How long would I continue to feel guilty for being alive? Where so many died, I did not. To this day whenever I have a good time those feelings creep in. But when it comes to suffering, I don't mind the punishment. I grin and bear it.

There we were in this factory full of coats of all kinds. They had a tough time fitting me with a three quarter coat since I was so short. Finally the decision was made. A flared grey wool coat would go well with the ballerina style skirts we wore in nineteen forty eight.

At the coat factory, the women spoke Yiddish. The merchant said it was his pleasure to give me the coat free of charge. "It is the least I can do for a person of your experiences," he said. Since liberation, people had been giving us things wherever we happened to be. It was good to know that people cared and at the same time wanted to let us know that they were aware of the horrors we experienced, like losing family members.

I was very disappointed to be living in a small town like Ossining. Gotebord, the second largest city in Sweden, had had a lot to offer within a short distance. In addition to the culture shock I experienced in Ossining, I found myself isolated and extremely lonely. My cousin, Irene, arranged for me to go to school to learn English. Word got around that I was in a concentration camp in Germany and soon I was interviewed and photographed by the radio station and the local papers. I was a novelty, a news item.

The headlines in the local paper read:

"Czech girl does not wish to return to her native country, Czechoslovakia, because it is occupied by Communists."

Once things quieted down and I no longer was current news, I was left to my own without any friends. Young people my age (early twenties) either were in college or already had jobs and were not around. I was like a little hurt puppy looking for somebody to pick me up and be with me. There was nobody for me about my age. I was lonely and did not speak English well so I could not go far on my own. It was very frustrating to say the least.

It was very important that my socializing be with Jewish people. I had been so hurt by the Christian world during the War years that I decided to stay with my own people. There was an exception in my mind when it came to the Swedish people. All my non-Jewish friends in Gotebord were

extremely tolerant Protestants who respected other religions. They were not a fanatic people. Where I came from in Czechoslovakia, the Roman and Greek Orthodox churches inflicted much evil upon the Jewish people in the name of religion.

Dark eyed Tony, the thirty year old son of an Italian family that lived near my cousins, approached me one day and asked me for a date. Right from the start I let him know how I felt before our friendship had a chance to come to anything. It was fine with him. He explained his interest in me. He had seen me around looking very sad and he wanted to show me some fun places like Coney Island. We double dated with friends of his. There were rides on the roller coaster, a lot of fun and laughter and I just could not hack it. I could not bear their lightheartedness. We were worlds apart. In one way I envied them that they could laugh just about any little thing and I could not be part of the group. When I started telling them about the war they did not want to hear it. "The war's over. It's time to have fun now."

I thought to myself, "Sure the war is over for you but inside me the war still rages on." Little by little the message came loud and clear: Keep it to yourself. So, I locked it up tighter than a drum. People were simply afraid to hear the horror stories we had to tell or to see the pictures that were shown in documentaries. The reports had such a profound affect on people that they separated our lives during the war years from

their own. At times I felt ashamed of my experiences and was not going to talk about it. Besides, there were no listeners.

One day I received a card from a nun who read about me in the paper. This elderly Hungarian lived at the nearby Maryknoll Monastery and wanted very much to meet me. She asked me to come for lunch. She was aware of the Kosher dietary laws, and wrote that since her duties were in the kitchen, she herself would prepare a strictly vegetarian meal, making sure that my dietary needs would be met. When we met, this saintly little lady could not do enough for me. Could she be of any help? Maybe help me get a job? Readers Digest nearby would be a good place to seek employment. She wished me good health and happiness in my new land. She was very touched by the report of my experiences that she had read in the paper, and kept in touch with me until her death soon after. I was sad to read about the passing of this kindhearted lady who genuinely showed her pain regarding man's inhumanity to man. I was open to her feelings towards me and felt good about our friendship. I did not show these feelings with others for fear that I might tarnish the memory of our people. May her soul rest in peace.

As my English improved, I was given a job in my cousin's laundry, finding the clean garments for customers. It was a good place to practice my new language. People had fun with my pronunciations, especially as I learned to read abbreviations. For instance, the claim ticket for Saint

Martins Church read St.Martin's. I said, "Here is S.T.Martin's." They roared with laughter. They could not understand why I had a tough time with the word 'eraser'. I could not get it in my mind how anything sounding like 'ereiser' could be spelled another way. The English language was hard to learn because so many words sound the same but mean different things.

My teeth started to give me trouble. The dentist told me that my upper molars on both sides were decayed, infected and loose, and that they had to come out. Since I needed money to replace them, I had to get a real job. I went downtown to a dressmaking company where I told the Jewish owner about my hard luck story. I knew how to run a sewing machine and I was hired to make sleeves on women's jackets. At first the noise was so loud I could not bear it. I was the only Jewish girl there. Most of the workers were married women who had to help their families with additional income. They came in sick with colds yet they worked hard on piecework. The foreman saw to it that everything ran smoothly and orderly. The factory machine was electrified, not manually run like the one we had at home. I had a tough time geting used to it's speed. But once I got the feel of it I started making good money.

When I made the money I needed for my teeth I wanted out. I wanted to work in a different place, dealing with books. I could speak and write Czech, Russian, German, Yiddish, Hungarian, Swedish, and I was picking up English very well. I landed a job at the Forty Second Street Library in

New York City, cataloging books as they came in. It was a shlep getting into New York from Ossining and the job paid little.

In the meantime, I kept in touch with my friend, Fany. I invited her to visit me in Ossining. Instead, she asked me to come to the Bronx and, even better, "Why don't we meet at Central Park in New York". Somehow I found my way and when we met, Fany informed me that her name was now Phyllis. She was full of news about what she was doing. Most important of all, she told me that she had a boy friend. She was the first from our group to have a serious fellow. But there was a hitch. They had fallen very much in love before he told her that he had a child from his first marriage. In my wisdom I told her that he wanted to be sure of her first. She couldn't understand why he did not trust her from the start. I said that when we love somebody, we are afraid to loose them by complicating things. We, of all people, who have seen so much human misery are especially cautious. She even had a ready made kid to love. "If you really love him as you say, call him right now. I want to meet him," I said.

She did and he came to the park within a short time. He was tall and good looking and they made a handsome couple together. They married and have been happy ever since.

My life did not improve at all. I was lonely in my time off from work, longing for people my own age, and wanting to be on my own. I

somehow did not belong in a family setting. I could not bear sibling dissention and felt that I was a contributing factor at the time. I was totally out of step when it came to family togetherness.

I moved to Providence, Rhode Island, at the suggestion of a visiting cousin. A job interview arranged with a Jewish organization was a fiasco. To my horror, they expected someone entirely different from myself. Whoever made the contact did not sufficiently explain that I was just a few months in this country. The group could not afford to hire someone like me with language limitations. I was told to come back when my English was proficient. When I walked out of that building onto the street, I was sick and humiliated. I had left a home where things were not necesarily ideal but at least I felt secure. Now I was all alone in a strange city without a job. After three days I was told to vacate the place I stayed in. I felt as if the buildings on Dorance Street in downtown Providence were swaying and crushing against my temples. I will never forget those feelings. I had to pull myself together and have a serious talk with my self. Am I going to simply collapse from this experience or am I going to pull my inner resources together and see what else I could do?

I got the newspaper and started looking for the want ads. There was an ad: Accounts payable bookeeper wanted. I went to the interview the next day. I was not a bookeeper but I knew if given a chance I could be. I was desperately looking for that opportunity. I knew one thing from my past

experiences in life. I had to go out there, put my best foot forward, make a good appearance, and show no doubts in myself. The job was described to me and I said 'yes' to all the questions put to me. After the interview I was told by the office head lady that I was the seventh person interviewed for the job. If I would be chosen, I would hear from her in a few days. At that moment, I said, "If you want me I am available here and now. I will not be available tomorrow."

On that note she said she thought I would be a good choice because I had to support myself. " You will be a good worker," she said. "Stay here until I get back from lunch. We will try you out this afternoon."

As soon as she stepped out of the office I went over to a dark haired lady who was working on a big ledger. She had a friendly face with dark eyes and sat tall on her chair. I asked her what my job was all about. I told her that I had worked in an office but that I knew nothing about accounts payable. Her name was Elsie, she said. She spoke kindly to me, and turning to the other woman who was typing, she said, "Millie, we have to help this girl out. She is all alone and needs this job to support herself. How about it?"

Millie brought a ledger to Elsie who took charge of making an accounts payable bookeeper out of me. Luckily, Mrs. D. stayed away a whole hour! (She had very bad teeth. It took her a while to dig the food particles out of them with a toothpick.) When she returned, she called me over to sit

at a desk. She placed the same ledger in front of me that Elsie had instructed me on just a few moments before. I sat down in front of the bills and the ledger book, took a pen in my hand, and made entries while Mrs. D. stood beside me. After a while she said, "You will do. We will see you tomorrow at 9:00 sharp." I thanked her and as I left the office, I silently expressed my great appreciation and humility to both Elsie and Millie.

I worked four and a half days a week, Tuesday through Saturday on accounts payable, and quickly realized that Mrs D. was a tough boss. Elsie, who became my staunch friend and confidant, pleaded with her to let me leave work early on Saturdays so I could catch the 1:00 p.m. Yankee Clipper to go to my relatives in Ossining N.Y. I had my job done for the week but, according to Mrs. D., we were not to move from our desks until the 1:00 p.m. office closing time. She did not care that I would spend the weekend alone. Only once did the office manager allow me to leave before twelve o'clock on Saturday. She did not want it to become a habit.

After moving out of the temporary apartment I shared with a relative, I moved in with an elderly lady who provided room and board. Her meals never varied, so I knew exactly what to expect for dinner every day of every week, week after week. Soon I began suffering with bowel problems and brownish patches appeared on my face. I had developed a serious vitamin A deficiency, more than enough to upset my fragile health balance.

That's when I decided to look after my own needs.

I rented another furnished apartment, this one with kitchen privileges. I ate better but there was another pitfall. My second elderly roommate did not take to me. In fact, her treatment of me was deadly. Her only conversation consisted of telephone discussions with her friends concerning her ailments. I could not comprehend how one person could have so many things wrong with them, yet go to work and eat as heartily as this lady did. I watched her daily routine. This no-nonsense lady ate straight from the pots, wasting nothing. She walked around in her underwear every morning until ready to leave for work. After a few months, I felt that if I stayed there with her much longer, I would certainly go mad. So I answered an ad in our local paper for a furnished room with kitchen privileges.

This time, things were even worse. Soon after I moved in, the people on the first floor warned me that this lady was not easy to live with. But it was too late. I was there. Not many people wanted somebody to share an apartment. One of my own was prohibitive. This old lady did have a screw loose. For example, she regularly followed me to the bathroom to check up on me. Did I allow the water to run while I brushed my teeth? She started locking me out of the house when she decided that I did not meet her going-to-bed times. I banged on her door until she finally decided to open it. I sure had no use for my key. Annie and her

niece, Harriet, the first floor women, suggested that I should marry and have a home of my own. Newly married Harriet was going to ask her brother to fix me up. Annie crocheted a handkerchief for me, letting me know that there were nice people out there.

In the meantime, I improved my social life by joining Massada, a Zionist organization. One of the nice people I met there was bright, pretty Ethel, a girl my own age, who had teeth like pearls. Sometimes we double dated and I remember spending my day off visiting with her and her parents in their home. While sitting in their kitchen I pretended that I too belonged to them. I hated to leave the warm environment.

I also met a bitter young girl who seemed to blame me for coming here and taking eligible young men away from the American born women to whom they rightfully belonged. I remember telling her that this is a free country. I asked her why she didn't go out and get herself a man.

I was often discouraged, but not for long. I knew very well that I had a stigma attached to me. After all I was a refugee, a nobody with no family. Who was I? What did I have to offer to a family of good standing in the community? Later on, I understood that every mother wants the very best for her children. I was a stranger in town with no visible "yichas" (prestige to speak for me). That I was a good, caring person was not good enough. I was made to feel different. I resented it then and still do. Many times I walked away from a date for that reason. I let them know that

I too once had a mother and a father. Nobody was going to take advantage of me. All I had was myself and that had to stand in my stead.

I'll never forget one double date. My date's friend drove the car to Fall River to pick up his girl. I was very impressed with the girl friend's house. A beautiful chandelier hanging from the high ceiling lit the entrance hall. Down the long stairway came a smartly dressed young woman with her mother. They offered us sparkling glasses of champagne and the mother urged the young man to bring her daughter back not too late. Oh, how I wished it could have been me with my family. Tears welled up in my eyes. I had to force them back inside.

As soon as we were in the car, the girl threw herself at her young man and he said, "Let's drive over to the park." I thought he meant an amusement park. Instead we drove to a desolate place that was pitch black. He stopped the car and the two were in each other's clutches, behaving like wild animals let loose in the front seat. Once they satisfied each other, there was calm as if after a storm.

I was devastated. How were we supposed to act back there while they behaved so outrageously? I had seen a lot in my young life, but nothing so morally humiliating as this. I blamed my date for it. He swore up and down that he didn't know what would happen. At the same time, I felt sorry for the parents of this girl who behaved like a dog on the street.

I felt so alone. I had no one to vouch for me, and I took pride in

my moral code of behavior. What two consenting adults might do in privacy was their own business, but for people to act like that in front of total strangers was too much "chutzpah" (nerve) for me.

Another time, I was fixed up with a young man who came from New York to meet me. The chemistry was wrong off the bat. But my friend Anita had made reservations for three couples at the Coca Cabana night club, and we went. The menu came and everybody ordered their favorite dishes. I did not know what to do. I listened to what the others ordered, but didn't know what the dishes were, so I told the waiter I would have the same as the young man sitting next to me. What came next was unbelievable. In front of me on the plate was a huge red spider in a shell -- my first sight of a lobster. I was expected to launch into that thing and eat it to the last crumb. Needless to say, I would not even touch it.

Lobster was not a cheap item on the menu. The young man did not even look at me for the rest of the evening. Poor guy! He had come all the way from New York for that. I know the evening was ruined for everybody.

My cousin Dora from Chicago took me to a Chinese restaurant. "Just sit back and relax," she said. "I'll order something you will like." No sooner said than the waiter brought two plates that he placed front of us. There they were; snails in open shells, called Blue Points. My cousin picked them up with a cocktail fork, one after another, dipped them in tomato sauce, put them in her mouth and swallowed them. I ran toward the

ladies' room as fast as I could. Those were my restaurant adventures until I learned how to read well and no longer had to rely on other people.

In May of 1949, my downstairs neighbor, Harriet, called me in to her house to tell me I could have a date that Saturday night if I wanted to. "I sure do." I said. And that Saturday night, I met my future husband, Max. He was the nicest person I had ever met. He was kindly, lively and charming. From the minute we met, he wanted to take care of me and, to this day, he still does. He touched my heart as if God made him specially for me. I had lost much of my family. Max understood and has always tried to make up for my losses. We became engaged on July 31st, 1949 and married on October 29 of the same year.

My brothers Dudie and Bencie came to our wedding, our first face-to-face meeting, all three of us together for the first time since the war. And the New York relatives, Irene and Benny, Sarah and Joe came, each bringing their favorite culinary speciality for my "simcha" (wedding).

When Max and I married, we had no money. We lived in a one and a half room furnished apartment owned by his father, George Rose. Max's brother, Morris, who lived in the same apartment building, collected our rent each week.

There was no handout. I worked for Great Scott Food Market doing accounts payable. We saved every dollar possible and even sold Max's car for an older model to scrape up enough money to buy a three storey house.

It took us many years to pay for the house. Such a thing was unheard of in Europa. Here in the United States, there are so many opportunities for anyone who is willing to work. But it does take time.

We have a son, Harold Lawrence, named after my grandfathers, Chayem and Leib. When our beautiful baby was born, both of us were overjoyed. Nothing was too much when it came to this child. I loved taking care of this happy boy whose personality fit mine so well. I never had to holler at him and I would not. If he got upset, I cushioned his pain. I believe that a child should feel secure. Life as is is tough enough. Why make a child's life miserable? I could never forget how the children suffered at the hands of the Germans, and can't bear to see a child punished for inconsequential things. I wanted our son to be well educated. Whenever I came across a beautiful article, I asked him to read it. One day at the age of eleven, he opened his big brown eyes and said to me, "I know mother. You would like me to be a Rabbi," large tears coming down his cheeks, "but please, mother, you will have to let me be me."

Why he picked on a Rabbi, I'll never know. I can only guess that the materials I gave him to read were written by Jewish thinkers. He drew his own conclusion. My thinking was that he would get secular education in the schools and my job was to open the door to Jewish culture for him. From that day on, we let him choose and we were there to guide him along only. He married his high school sweetheart, Eileen. They have two children,

Gregory Jarad and Mitchell Jacob. Gregory, named after Max's father, Gedalaye, and my father, Zalman, was born the day after Passover early in the morning-- on the same day that we were brutally herded away from our home in Czechoslovakia. Every year on that particular morning, I would hurt badly but since Gregory's birth, my feelings have changed. Instead, I choose to think about him and about how our son kept us informed during the night of his birth.

To me it seems a miracle. There I was, taken to a place of hell where everything was geared to my destruction. Against all odds I am here to tell the story. I love those two little boys with all my heart and soul. They are so innocent. Children touch me deeply. They don't have to be mine. To me, all children are the conscience of humanity.

The vivid memory of the march to Mauthausen has not left my brother, Dudie. He believes that he survived because he did not surrender to hopelessness. He remembers his first view of the Alps. As he looked up at the awesome sight, he said to his marching partner, "Look at how magnificent this is".

The man looked back at him and said, "You must be insane."

"I think this is the reason I survived, because the same marcher was not there the next day. I must have kept up my spirits. I must have kept up my admiration for things I encountered."

Dudie arrived at Mathausen a few weeks before the war ended. Soon

after he arrived, the Nazis fled from the camp. As the sun rose on May 9, 1945, he and a friend walked out the gate. He had not eaten a real meal in about a month. "We were so hungry. This was beyond anything one could comprehend," he told a reporter. "I knocked on the door of a house and asked the old woman inside for food. She came back with a chunk of bread. That incident was one of my most pleasant memories."

After separate searches at the war's end, each brother learned that the other had been seen by former townspeople.

After Bencie and our father left Auschwitz, they remained together for a long time. Bencie remembers that the worst aspect of his imprisonment during that period was having to watch Tatika suffer under the miserable prison conditions. He told me that the emotional strain gave him no peace until after they were separated. "It was a relief to be shipped out of camp and not to have to see Tatika wither away."

Bencie got word that Dudie was seen in Rumania. Since his search for Dudie there turned up nothing, Bencie decided to go home to Svaljava as father told us all to do. Dudie was not there either because of a very unpleasant experience with some of the neighbors. He had been there, but he left after being threatened because of our father's supposedly political bourgeoisie ideals. From there, Bencie went to Nelipeno, the little town where our Grandma Ruchel lived. As he was returning to Svaljava, he met Dudie on Main Street, walking in the opposite direction, toward Nelipeno.

Together they went to Prague, and later located me.

Dudie enrolled in medical school in Prague. As soon as the Russians started to put clamps down on the borders, he and Bencie set out for Germany which they hoped would serve as a faster route out of Europa. Eventually Dudie earned the privilege of emigrating to the U.S.A. on a student visa by working for the H.I.A.S.

At the age of nineteen, Bencie came on a displaced person visa to the United States. He finished his high school education, was drafted into the army, took his basic training in the United States, and was shipped to the front lines of the Korean War zone. When the army discovered from processing his records that Bencie was a survivor of the Holocaust, they took steps to change his assignment, without his knowledge. Several months after his arrival at the front, a special unit appeared at Bencie's camp while he was out on a late-night patrol. The unit waited for his return and escorted him by jeep to division headquarters where he was treated royally with a hot meal and a shower and all the sleep he could get in. He was reassigned to supplies, away from the dangerous battle zone because, as he was told, the Army realized the full extent of his past experiences and was sensitive to his emotional well-being.

G-d bless this country which opened its doors to young people like us who had lost everything in our young lives. We lost the most precious beings, our families, who we miss so much to this very day. We cannot forget them. They would have enriched our lives and who knows what contributions to society they might have made. What a waste! What an

emptiness in our hearts! Hitler did a good job on us. He left a lingering chronic pain that will last till the end of our days.

Uncle Shloime was released from Siberia during Krushev's regime. He came back to his home town of Nelipeno, unaware of all that had happened there. He married Rechi, a Nelipeno girl, adopted a son, and then they had a daughter. Shloime and Rechi asked for permission to visit his sister in Czeske Budjejovice. While Dubchek tried to gain freedom for Czechoslovakia from Russia, Uncle Shloime traveled from Karpatoruth in Eastern Czechoslovakia, to his sister, Civje in the western region of our country. From there, they escaped to Germany, then went to live in Israel.

One day in 1968, I received a letter bearing an Israeli stamp, from Uncle Shloime. I was elated. He had very little, but from time to time he sent needle point embroideries which I had framed to decorate our living room. In 1972, Max and I, and my brother Dudie and his family, were reunited with Uncle Shloime in Israel. He was very happy to see us and our reunion will always remain in my memory.

"You survived, Lajcsuka. How did you do it," he kept asking me.

"Some day I will write a book about it.

"You should, you should," he said. When we asked him how he survived he said, "I came as a friend to Stalin's Russia. I was not trusted. I was still a Jew and not a Russian. They made me into an enemy. Instead of fighting the Germans, I was imprisoned and sent to a forced labor camp in that cold place, Siberia. They worked us hard as they could with very little food. I was a construction worker laying bricks. Think of me when you see those buildings on television."

His wife, Rechi, was with me in Auschwitz, although I wasn't aware of her there. She witnessed Mengelle's selection when I lost my sister Rifka. In her letter to me, she described it all in detail, even adding that afterwards we shared the same bunk. What a coincidence! We met their daughter, Rita, and the adopted son who came homeon special furlough from the Israeli army to greet his American cousins.

Uncle Shloime told me that he kissed the ground when he arrived in

Israel. At the time, his skin was covered with psoriasis and he was advised to bathe in the Dead Sea. He did and all his sores disapeared. He had a small little place in Tel-Aviv, no more than a hole in the wall, where he made his living as a picture framer. We brought him gifts from America. He had a gift for all of us, including my brother, Bencie, back home. He wanted each of us to have a remembrance of him and we understood that.

"Gebliben aleine" (left alone) he kept repeating.

Leaving him seemed impossible. Uncle Shloime walked us to the bus. As we passed a row of evergreen trees on the way, I picked a nice size pine cone. It felt good in my hand. Whenever I am under stress, I use this cone and Uncle Shloime comes to mind every time. There were no goodbyes. My cousin, Rita, escorted us to our next stop. Uncle Shloime continued walking. As the bus pulled away, we could see his frame slowly disappearing until there was only a dot left.

In 1977, we invited him to our son's wedding. We all got together and sent him a round trip ticket. He was thrilled to be coming to America. Unfortunately, he never made it. He died of a stroke ten days before his scheduled arrival, the last person on my father's side to die. How I wished that he could have made it. It was such a let down.

Soon after, a package arrived with his hand writing on it. There were gifts for the newlyweds, and shiny trays for all of us as well. When

the package arrived, the finality of his death and the end of my father's family really hit me. I sat down and cried. Life can be so cruel at times. My Uncle lived to see his daughter married and his first grandchild. I know he dreamed about visiting America but his time ran out. His death, in his fifties, was an awful loss to our family and friends. He loved his fellow man, and was helpful to others who knew him. In return, people looked up to him and sought his advice. They appreciated his intellect, his wit and his courage. He was what I would call a 'mentch', a good human being. May his soul rest in peace.

The Germans decided that life for some people was not worth living. Their initial focus on the sick was later enlarged to include the socially unproductive, then the ideologically unwanted and, finally, all non-Germans.

All killing is evil, but killing innocent children is the most heinous act of all.

After all that is known and documented, some people profess that the Holocaust never took place. There are actually people in this country who are that cruel. I would say that is a hard pill to swallow. Denial of those events is so horrendous, it intensifies the survivor's pain until it becomes unbearable.

To think of Dr.Mengele the beast being harbored by people in, of all places, South America, is to invite suffering at his hands once again. For a Holocaust survivor, the denial and the giving of refuge to a killer of little children increases the agony a thousand fold. For all these years we kept our experiences to ourselves. There were very few takers for our tales and, truthfully, the pain was too fresh. For some of us, to confront what we felt, to open the wound, was asking too much of ourselves

The discovery of Mengele's remains made our past front page news once again. When his bones were dug out of the ground in June of 1985, I said to myself, maybe there is some justice after all. I will explain why.

When a person dies, he should be at peace. Having your body exhumed, examined, exploited before the world is not resting in peace. He is not at peace even in death. He will never be.

That night after I learned of his death, I had a terrible dream. He continued to prevail over me. In my dream I felt that my body was severed by him. I felt blood oozing out of me and I wondered when will the agony end.

I and I alone must have control. I must end it. What hurts the most is that we were the loneliest victims of the most inhuman of wars. There was not a sign anywhere that we were not forgotten.

Mengele's death was a tremendous letdown. To remember his utter contempt for our people in Hitler's death camps and the atrocities he perpetuated against us boggles the mind. And to think that he was never brought to justice, that he would never be tried by the world's court of law for committing genocide against the Jewish people is beyond human understanding.

Therefore we must leave behind us a legacy of Justice, so that anyone who commits genocide will be brought to justice.

My husband, Max, asks: "Why were the railroad tracks leading to Auschwitz never bombed?"

The only answer that has held up is simply that the world did not care.

We must never stop caring. We must not be indifferent. Indifference helps only the enemy. All who perished suffered alone and like the children of Auschwitz, died alone. We must not forget them. Their cries to the heavens above went unanswered. These martyrs of Auschwitz-Berkenau, Buchenwald, and all the other camps died while their murderers carried out the most systematic mass murders ever perpetrated upon another people in the history of mankind. Let our voices be heard throughout the planet Earth in their ever lasting memory. Let it be a reminder of what evil man is capable of committing.

Their ultimate suffering should serve as a legacy for future generations. Let us remember them lest we deny them their death as well.

We must teach the young about this lethal act to mankind. That is my wish. We owe it to the innocent victims of the Holocaust.

As for myself, I must persevere.

THE END

Tales of the Baal Shem Tov

There lived a poor man with a large family, whose situation was so precarious that it came to the attention of the Baal Shem Tov. This saintly man, born outside the Gates of Eden, was said to have an everlasting soul. He came to the poverty stricken man and told him about a king who was very ill. "Go", he said, "Go to the king. Offer him some "knokel" (garlic). You know its healing powers. You use it for every imagineable ailment. Plus, it wards off the 'Yeicer Harah' (the Evil Eye)."

The poor man embarked on the long journey to the royal palace. At the palace gates he had to convince the guards that his mission was one of mercy. After great discussion the guards let him in and the poor man prepared a scrumptious meal with the garlic he had brought along.

The food smelled so good, that the king grew anxious to taste it. He sat at his palacious table with the poor Jew seated to his right, and began to eat. When the king had finished the delicious dinner, he announced that he was going to lie down, and that the Jew should also take a rest since he must be tired after the long journey.

Royal guards escorted the Jew to a beautifully furnished room which enchanted him so that he instantly fell asleep. He did not know how long he rested before he was awakened by the king's man and ordered to return immediately to the king's room for an audience.

To the poor Jew's amazement, the king couldn't thank him enough for his wonderful afternoon rest. Never had the king felt so well after eating his noon day meal as he did this day. As a reward, he instructed his men to fill the poor Jew's back pack with gold as high and as full as the garlic had been packed. The poor man left the palace, walking straight as a rod, feeling as proud as a man of riches should.

The story of his journey to the king spread all over the Karpathian Mountains. Another man thought that if garlic had made such a hit with the king, why, onions could be a hit as well. On his own, he journeyed to see the generous king who had treated the poor Jew so nobly. This time, it was easy to persuade the guards to let him in since he explained that he, too, brought healing and good health to the king, and an easier life for everyone.

The king greeted him graciously, as he had the first man. And after a meal and a rest, the king thanked the man and rewarded him in kind. He instructed his men to fill the man's bag with as much garlic as he had brought onions.

The difference here was that the Baal Shem Tov had not sanctioned the journey.